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The Sunday Telegraph

Khamenei dead in rubble

- Jubilant Trump declares that 'one of the most evil people in history is dead'
- Massive attacks on Islamic Republic by US and Israel in push for regime change
- Iran retaliates against Israel and hits five Gulf states, including hotel in Dubai

THE WHITE HOUSE

By **Connor Stringer** *in Washington,* **Henry Bodkin** *in Jerusalem and* **Akhtar Makoii**

IRAN'S Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has been killed in a major assault on Iran launched by Israel and the United States, Donald Trump announced last night.

The Ayatollah's body, riddled with shrapnel wounds, was recovered from the rubble after a daylight bombing raid aimed at toppling the regime destroyed his Tehran compound.

Israel and the US conducted 900 strikes in 12 hours on military bases, nuclear sites and government buildings across Iran using F-35s, F-22s, and – for the first time – one-way attack drones.

Announcing Khamenei's death, the US president said that many of the regime's military, security and police forces were ready to lay down their weapons and submit to the US.

"Khamenei, one of the most evil people in History, is dead," Mr Trump wrote on Truth Social. "This is the single greatest chance for the Iranian people to take back their Country."

Photographs of Khamenei's body were shown to Mr Trump and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu as proof of his assassination, which was met with celebrations in the streets of London and Tehran. In Finchley, north London, hundreds of Iranians waved flags and honked car horns as celebrations spilled on to the streets of the area known as "little Tehran".

Khamenei's death represents the gravest blow to the Iranian regime since the 1979 revolution, when the Ayatollahs swept into power. Last night, tens of thousands of people flooded Tehran and other major cities demanding change. In Galleh Dar, Fars province, a statue of Khamenei was torn down and set alight. One person could be heard saying: "Am I dreaming?" Welcome to the new world."

Israel's massive strike on Khamenei's compound, where several of the regime's leaders were thought to have met yesterday, was the opening salvo of what is expected to be a days-long attack.

Iran last night responded by firing missiles and drones at US bases and civilian targets in five Gulf states as it pledged a "crushing" retaliation. Iranian missiles breached Israel's Iron Dome and landed in Tel Aviv, killing one woman and injuring 20 others. A five-star hotel in Dubai, several residential buildings in Bahrain and Kuwait's international airport were struck as Tehran retaliated with a barrage of ballistic missiles that it had refused to give up during negotiations on Thursday.

A picture of Ali Khamenei's body was shown to Donald Trump, above, who monitored the attack on Iran from Mar-a-Lago

The luxury Fairmont Hotel in Dubai was engulfed in flames last night after being struck by a Shahed suicide drone. Four people were injured, and British guests were last night sheltering in the basement as missiles continued to be fired towards the UAE. Dubai's international airport was also bombed.

Iran also struck the US navy 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain, the most vulnerable of American bases, while debris rained down from the skies above Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan.

The Qatari interior ministry said eight people were injured by falling shrapnel from intercepted missiles. Jordan said it "dealt with" 49 drones and ballistic missiles.

Flights across the Middle East have been cancelled, leaving hundreds of thousands of people stranded. Air defence fire thudded over Dubai, the United Arab Emirates' commercial capital last night. Shrapnel from an Iranian missile attack on the UAE capital killed one person, state media said.

In Iran, Mohammed Pakpour, the chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, and Amir Nasirzadeh, its defence minister, were also killed along with 40 other senior fgures of the regime, according to reports.

Mr Trump told Iranian guards to lay down their weapons or face certain death as he urged the Iranian public to force regime change. Addressing the nation, the US president said he had begun operation "Epic Fury" to ensure Americans would never be threatened by a nuclear-armed Iran.

"I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand," he said in a video posted on Truth Social. More than 12 hours later, he added: "The heavy and pinpoint bombing, however, will continue, uninterrupted throughout the week or, as long as necessary to achieve our objective of PEACE THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AND, INDEED, THE WORLD!"

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Mr Netanyahu said the joint attack would last "as long as needed," unleashing a wave of strikes that threatened to destabilise the region.

Mr Trump monitored the operation from Mar-a-Lago, his Florida holiday home, alongside key members of his administration.

"For 47 years, the Iranian regime has chanted 'Death to America' and waged an unending campaign of bloodshed," he said. "Its menacing activities directly endanger the United States, our troops, our bases overseas and our allies throughout the world. They can never have a nuclear weapon."

The US had amassed an intense strike force in the region while pressing Iran to use its nuclear programme in negotiations that failed to reach an agreement on Thursday. According to senior US officials, US intelligence believed there were indicators that Iran intended to use its ballistic missiles against US troops.

Iran was also unwilling to discuss its support for proxy groups in the region, sources said, and the US came to believe it was not negotiating seriously about a deal.

President needs Iranian commanders to turn against regime

John Bolton

LAUNCHING military strikes to effect regime change in Tehran is the most consequential decision of Donald Trump's presidency.

Speaking shortly after joint US-Israeli combat operations began, he stressed the dangers the ayatollahs and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) posed to the US and the world, and their own fellow citizens.

Iran's nuclear-weapons and ballistic-missile programmes and its perennial ranking as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism are undeniably threats to legitimate US national-security interests. Washington's objective of eliminating these threats is proper and justifiable.

I wouldn't have done it entirely as Trump has but, as he said, this is "a noble mission". The real question is whether he is serious. Or is this just a limited attack, after which he will declare total victory and walk away?

The obstacles are many, starting with the certain opposition from China and Russia, for which the ayatollahs have served as willing Middle Eastern partners.

Large segments of the West's liberal-Left establishment will be appalled at this reversal from Trump's first term. And one can only imagine the fury of US neo-isolationists. On the other hand, the centre-Left Canadian and Australian governments promptly announced support for the strikes.

Criticism that Trump did not "give diplomacy a chance" is easily dismissed. Thursday's Iran-US negotiations in Geneva made no progress toward an acceptable deal on Tehran's nuclear-weapons or ballistic-missile programmes, or its widespread international terrorism.

AMIR KHOLOUSI / ISNA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Rescuers search through the rubble of a collapsed building at the site where a missile hit a neighbourhood in Tehran yesterday

The ayatollahs and the IRGC have never considered renouncing these priorities, as they have proved during more than four decades. In recent weeks, after January's barbaric repression of dissent across Iran, they have merely played for time.

Most importantly, has the US co-ordinated sufficiently with the Iranian resistance, both in-country and with Iran's diaspora in Europe and North America? Trump had previously drawn a red line against the regime's domestic brutality, which the IRGC ignored, so his and the US's credibility required vindication.

The best scenario in the current circumstances is that the ongoing US-Israeli attacks against the instruments of Iranian state power add to destabilising tendencies already at work. The crushing defeats of Iran's major terrorist proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah, and the lesser damage inflicted upon Yemen's Houthis and Iraqi militias have already produced enormous strains inside Iran's leadership. Last year's Twelve-Day War inflicted significant damage to Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes, and its leadership.

Massive anti-regime protests have illustrated there exists popular dissatisfaction at all levels of society and across all regions of the country. The protests stem not only from economic dissatisfaction, which is near-universal, but the dissent of young people who know they can have a different life; Iran's women who have rejected the very basis of the ayatollahs' rule by rejecting their commands on dress codes; and Iran's extensive ethnic populations seeking greater autonomy. All contribute to the fragmentation of the regime's leadership structures.

These fissures must urgently be exploited, most importantly by the Iranian resistance. Trump's pledge of immunity for the IRGC, regular military and police forces who lay down their arms is important.

When an authoritarian government begins to come apart, it can be every man for himself, both at government's highest levels, and among the rank and file. Find commanders, especially in the regular military and police force, but perhaps even in the IRGC, willing to split from the ayatollahs. Find even a few ayatollahs willing to call for the country's religious leaders to withdraw from politics and return to their true vocation. Those who abandon ship from the regime may not have the purest of motives but what matters is that they defect to what they should perceive as the winning side.

The immediate aftermath of regime collapse would most likely be some form of interim, military, secular government that should understand its mission is to restore order after what will very likely be a bloody struggle.

This interim government's limited mandate should allow Iranians to decide what kind of post-ayatollah government they want. Undoubtedly, this will not be easy, but for Iran's people, it is hard to see how any new government could be worse for them, let alone the rest of the world, than the one now hopefully coming apart.

For Iran, what lies ahead will be "the times that try men's souls", as Thomas Paine said of the American Revolution. There is no guarantee of success but there is every reason to strive for it.

John Bolton served as United States ambassador to the UN from 2005 to 2006, and as US National Security Advisor from 2018 to 2019

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When the talking had to stop Major events since June 2025 ceasefire

Ceasefire June 24, 2025
Twelve-day war between Iran, US and Israel ended with a ceasefire after strikes devastated Iranian nuclear facilities and killed senior commanders.

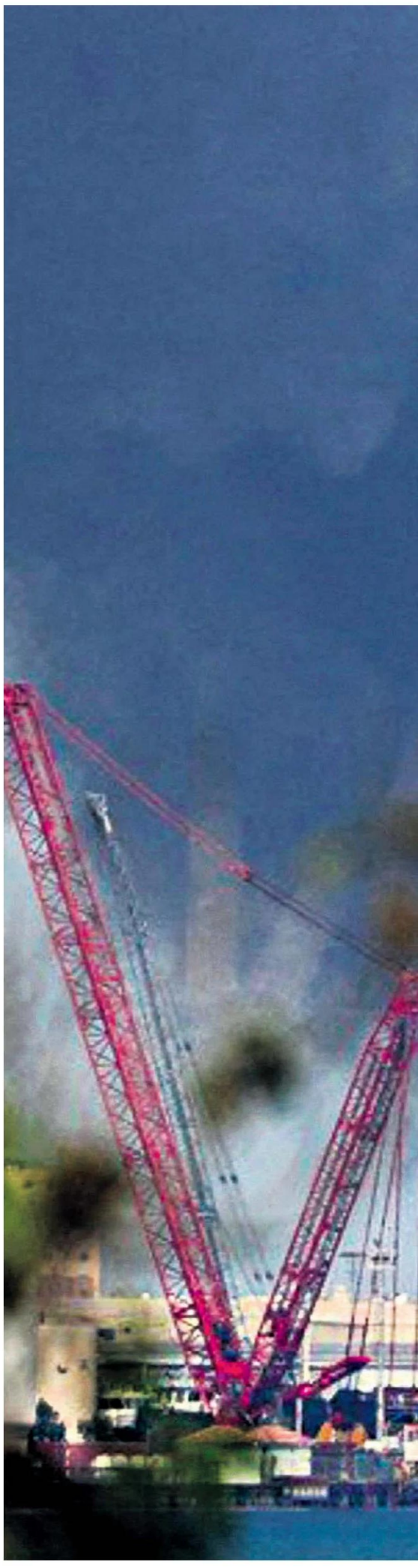
June 25
Nuclear programme damage assessment. Iran blocked IAEA inspectors from bombed sites. Satellite photos suggest efforts to assess damage and recover material.

Aug 5
Ali Larijani appointed as national security council secretary. Given portfolio covering protest suppression, Russia/Qatar/Oman liaison, nuclear negotiations and war planning.

Dec 27
Currency crashed to 150,000 rials per dollar. The government was forced to cut subsidies due to sanctions and war costs. Inflation soared. Essential goods unaffordable.

December/January 2026
Nationwide demonstrations against economic collapse, subsidy cuts evolved to anti-regime protests. Security forces killed more than 3,000. Nearly 52,000 arrests.

Feb 6
Indirect negotiations resumed between Iran and US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. Both sides explored a framework for nuclear restrictions and sanctions relief.



Smoke rises from buildings hit by Iran in Bahrain, right. A missile blasts from a US ship in the Gulf, above left, and UN peacekeepers at the scene after an Iranian missile was downed near Golan Heights in Israel, left

Day the Middle East was set alight

Trump hails Operation Epic Fury and tells Iran: Put down your weapons or you will face certain death

By **Akhtar Makoii**

THE first missile struck the compound of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei at 9.55am Tehran time. As many as 29 more followed shortly after.

Within minutes, the presidential palace in Pasteur Square was hit. Then the parliament building in Baharestan Square. The Ministry of Intelligence headquarters on Nejatollahi Street. The Ministry of Defence compound just off the Qasem Soleimani Expressway. The National security council headquarters on Valiasr Street. And Revolutionary Guards command centres across the capital.

There could be no doubt about Donald Trump's mission. This was about taking down Iranian regime.

Mohammed Pakpour, the chief of the Revolutionary Guards was killed, as was Amir Nasirzadeh, Iran's defence minister. Khamenei's daughter-in-law and son-in-law were also killed.

Mr Trump announced that Khameni himself was dead. Israel said his body had been pulled from the rubble.

"He was unable to avoid our Intelligence and Highly Sophisticated Tracking Systems and, working closely with Israel, there was not a thing he, or the other leaders that have been killed along with him, could do," said Mr Trump.

More than 200 US and Israeli jets surged into Iranian air space as strikes were launched across the country and continued last night.Revolutionary Guards' naval bases along the Persian Gulf coast were struck, as were missile production facilities in Qom, Karaj, Kermanshah and Bushehr.

Explosions were heard at Kharg Island, Iran's main oil export terminal, as well as in Tabriz, Dezful, Nahavand and Kangavar in Kermanshah province.

The United States launched strikes on Iran because intelligence indicated Tehran intended to use conventional missiles preemptively against US troops, and was rebuilding nuclear facilities destroyed in last year's war, rather than negotiating seriously, US officials said.

The US was willing to establish "guardrails and framework for a civilian nuclear programme - as other countries do – but Iran wanted to enrich, which the US said made no sense" for a purely civilian program, officials said.

Israel and the US took total control of Iranian airspace, handing their air forces free rein to fly across the country at will

Nuclear sites in Isfahan, Natanz and Fordow were being rebuilt after Operation Midnight Hammer last year.

"The US believed that they were rebuilding manufacturing capacity - a violation of existing protocols and what the US wanted after Midnight Hammer," officials said.

In Tehran, residents were told to leave the capital amid the ongoing bombardment.

In all, Iran's Red Crescent said more than 20 provinces were hit, with many residential homes also being struck.

Two hours later, Mr Trump addressed the world – and specifically the Iranian regime – about operation "Epic Fury".

"To the members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, the armed forces and all of the police, I say tonight that you must lay down your weapons and have complete immunity, or, in the alternative, face certain death."

Then he spoke to the Iranian people. "To the great, proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand... when we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations." He

Feb 17
Negotiations continued with IAEA'sl Rafael Grossi. Both sides reported progress but fundamental gaps remained over enrichment rights versus zero tolerance.

February
Two aircraft carrier groups positioned in the Persian Gulf with dozens of warships, fighter jets, bombers, refueling aircraft, anti-missile batteries.

Feb 17
Revolutionary Guards conducted live-fire drills, temporarily closing parts of strait through which 20 per cent of global oil passes.

Feb 20
Tehran offered US firms access to oil/gas fields, mining investments, aircraft purchases. The strategy was to create US stake-holders who would lobby against future withdrawal.

Feb 20
US president set a deadline, threatening military action if no deal reached. Claimed Iran developing intercontinental missiles.

Feb 26
Araghchi called talks "the most serious round." Both sides agreed on "guiding principles." Technical teams scheduled to meet Vienna tomorrow.

Feb 28
US and Israel launched extensive strikes on Iran. First bomb hit Khamenei's office at 9.55am.Lleader-ship compounds, nuclear sites and IRGC facilities targeted.

REUTERS/ ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES/ BAKR ALKASEM / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

This may be the start of a bitter and bloody race to power

David Blair
CHIEF FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR

NOW we know why America and Israel chose this moment for their joint onslaught against Iran's regime. They must have identified a fleeting opportunity to kill the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and bring his 37-year rule to a sudden and violent end.

First, Khamenei's demise in an air strike has yet to be publicly confirmed. Evidence of his death has reportedly been presented to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and Donald Trump. But Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, maintained that the Ayatollah was "safe and sound".

If Khamenei has been killed, the proposition that the Islamic Republic can survive the loss of any single individual will now be tested in the harsh winds of reality.

The Iranian constitution spells out what should happen if the Leader "becomes incapable" of performing his duties. Khamenei ought to be succeeded by a three-person "council" consisting of the president, the head of the judiciary and a senior cleric. As it happens, Masoud Pezeshkian, the president, is a weak politician whose own fate is uncertain.

The key figure in trying to steer the regime through this brutal crisis will probably be Ali Larijani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

Last night, after Israeli media reported that the Supreme Leader had been killed, Larijani posted on X: "We will make the Zionist criminals and the shameless Americans regret their actions."

If the Supreme Leader is gone, there will now be a race between the millions who wish to bring down the old order and the surviving acolytes of Khamenei, who will strive desperately to preserve the regime through some form of alternative leadership.

The rebellious masses may have to confront the most formidable pillar of the state, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Will the IRGC maintain its strength and cohesion after the possible loss of Khamenei and the confirmed death of its commander, Gen Mohammad Pakpour, who was killed yesterday?

Would any new collective leadership be able to rely on the brutal oppression of the IRGC to maintain itself in power?

How likely are the newly leaderless footsoldiers of the IRGC to transfer their loyalty to Larijani or whoever else might seek to establish a post-Khamenei leadership council?

There must be a possibility that rather than butcher their own people, they would prefer to stand aside and allow the masses to do as they will.

Having spent months planning this operation, US and Israel will surely have anticipated this moment.

There must be a possibility that they have covertly prepared an alternative leadership, perhaps consisting of some apparatchiks of the current regime, just as America hauled Nicolas Maduro from Caracas but left the rest of Venezuela's leadership intact.

If Khamenei is no more, these questions will decide the course of events in the days ahead.

The future of Iran and of the Middle East will hang on the answers.

and a terrorist regime decapitated

admitted that "Americans may be lost and there may be casualties."

Mr Trump launched the attack during nuclear negotiations. His envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner had been in Geneva on Thursday for what Iran's foreign minister called "one of the most serious rounds" of talks.

Oman's foreign minister, who was mediating the talks, said "peace is within our reach." Instead, there was war. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, said Israel had joined the operation "to remove the existential threat" posed by the Islamic Republic, and "create the conditions" for Iranians to change their destiny.

Sir Keir Starmer said British planes "are in the sky today" in the Middle East as part of defensive operations, though the UK was not directly involved.

The Revolutionary Guards announced "Operation True Promise 4" and claimed strikes on 14 American military bases across the Middle East. The targets included Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and Muwaffaq al-Salti Air Base in Jordan, though most missiles were intercepted.

The US navy's Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain was struck by a Shahed suicide drone, though no US personnel were injured. Iran claimed to have struck an American naval support ship, though the US denied this.

Iranian missiles targeted Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and northern Israel, though the Iron Dome appeared to hold.

In Israel, the government banned all unnecessary gatherings and advised citizens to stay close to bomb shelters.

Israeli airspace has also been closed until further notice.

An official from the European Union's naval mission Aspides said vessels have received VHF transmission from Iran's Revolutionary Guards saying "no ship is allowed to pass the Strait of Hormuz".

Iran's armed forces spokesman declared all American interests in the region "on land, sea and air" are legitimate targets. By midday, foreign minister Abbas Araghchi was on American television. He said: "Almost all officials are safe and sound and alive. We may have lost one or two commanders but that is not a big problem."

In Iran, it was feared that 85 people, including dozens of schoolgirls, were killed at the Shajare Tayyebe elementary school.

Iran's retaliation was as dangerous as it was desperate. Last night, it fired missiles and drones across civilian targets in the Middle East. The world-famous Fairmont Palm, a five-star hotel in Dubai, plus several residential buildings in Bahrain and Kuwait's international airport were all hit, while waves of ballistic missiles were fired at Israel.

Cars ablaze in central Tehran after first Israeli strikes hit the city

'I can go long and take over the whole thing or end it two or three days'

One breached the fearsome Iron Dome, killing one woman in Tel Aviv and injuring more than a dozen others.

The Dubai Palm was on fire after being struck by a drone. Four people were injured, and British tourists staying at the hotel were among those sheltering in the basement. At least one person was killed by debris from an intercepted missile in Abu Dhabi.

Eight people were injured in Qatar.

This is the second full-scale war between Iran and the United States and Israel in less than a year. The first war in June 2024 lasted 12 days. It ended with a ceasefire after strikes on Iranian nuclear sites and infrastructure.

This time, war came during negotiations that appeared to be making progress. Oman had mediated three rounds of talks. Iran had agreed never to stockpile enriched uranium. It was called a "major breakthrough" that meant Iran "will never ever have nuclear material that will create a bomb."

Technical teams were scheduled to meet in Vienna tomorrow. A fourth round of high-level negotiations was planned. Foreign minister Araghchi had called Thursday's Geneva talks "one of the most serious rounds." Neither side appears interested in limiting escalation. Iran promised operations "until definitive defeat of the enemy".

Mr Trump promised to "annihilate" Iran's navy and ensure the regime never gets nuclear weapons.

These objectives require regime change, not negotiated limits.

New details about American capabilities used in the war emerged Saturday afternoon. For the first time, the US military used "one-way attack drones" in combat. These are expendable weapons that loiter over targets and destroy themselves on impact.

US officials dismissed Iran's retaliation as "ineffective." The internet blackout in Iran cut connectivity to four per cent of normal levels. Major news agencies, including state outlet IRNA, were hacked and taken offline.

Basij militia patrols are deployed across Tehran to make sure there is no civil unrest, though some were seen celebrating the bombs falling on regime targets. Mr Trump said: "I can go long and take over the whole thing, or end it in two or three days and tell the Iranians – see you again in a few years if you start rebuilding."

Britons' shock as missiles hail down on Gulf's glitziest cities

Expats and tourists tell of constant explosions and exclusive resorts hit as Iran unleashes revenge barrage

By **Daniel Hardaker**
and **Benedict Smith**

BRITISH tourists and expats in the glitzy cities of the Persian Gulf woke on Saturday unaware they were about to experience the wrath of a besieged and vengeful Iranian regime.

In Dubai, visitors and residents began their weekends in the air-conditioned luxury of glittering apartment blocks, hotels and opulent gated estates they had long since grown accustomed to. Yet the pristine streets outside were soon to be littered with the debris from missile attacks, fired from across the sea by a Shia theocracy facing its greatest crisis since its seizure of power in 1979.

Explosions had erupted across Tehran, Iran's capital, at around 9am local time as the United States and Israel began a series of massive strikes aimed at annihilating a system that has tormented policymakers in Tel Aviv and Washington for decades.

Iran's response was swift. Wave after wave of missiles and drones were sent screaming through the sky towards Israel and US military bases all over the Middle East. Many, however, would come crashing down in some of the world's most exclusive neighbourhoods. One would smash into the front

Fire raging at the Fairmont Hotel on Palm Jumeirah in Dubai

of Dubai's five-star Fairmont Hotel. By evening, a fire raged near the entrance. Some of those inside had earlier taken refuge in the basement.

The Burj al Arab, a luxury hotel in the city, was hit by shrapnel after a drone was intercepted.

"The competent authorities in Dubai announced that a drone had been intercepted, and its shrapnel caused a limited fire on the exterior facade of the Burj Al Arab Hotel, and civil defence teams were able to control the incident without any injuries occurring," a statement from a Dubai Media Office spokespersonsaid.

At the nearby Bulgari Resort, Nick Candy, Reform UK's billionaire treasurer witnessed the chaos and told how his "hotel" shook from a missile impact.

"We heard the shudder and the whole building shook. The area is covered in police now," he said. "This is an area of Dubai where you have shopping, commercial properties, residential, restaurants," he added. "This is like a missile landing in Knightsbridge or Kensington in London."

Tara Thorpe, who moved from Britain to Dubai with her fiancé last year, heard the news of the Iran strikes by late morning – but the conflict seemed a long way from the easygoing luxury of the world in which she lived.

At noon she took her regular walk around the palm trees and lush grass of Dubai's Jumeirah Golf Estates, an eco-friendly residential and sports complex in the south of the city. Suddenly, with the blazing sun at its height in the sky and obscuring her vision, she heard "huge, thundering sounds overhead" and it dawned on her that her estate might be in the flight path of an Iranian retaliatory attack.

The Jumeirah complex is a short drive from the Port of Jebel Ali, the most frequently visited port by US Navy ships outside the United States. Smoke was to be seen rising from the area during the bombardment.

Ms Thorpe realised the danger she was in when she heard "two massive bangs overhead". They were interceptions, she said, fired at the incoming missiles by the UAE's air defence systems. "Never thought I'd see a missile live in action," she said.

A group of British expats watched the attacks from the Jumeirah estate's Crafty Fox Gastropub and Sports Bar. "What the f--k, that's two missiles, three missiles ... intercepted ... above our heads," they were heard saying.

Reports later emerged of the strike on the Fairmont Hotel, on the artificial island of Palm Jumeirah – home to luxury villas, apartments, hotels and beach clubs. It was "getting out of hand", one person said. "Bangs everywhere. They look like shooting stars."

One British businessman's client was among those sheltering in the basement of the Fairmont. Other wealthy residents of the Jumeirah island hurried to underground car parks for protection.

Everyone was by this point "basically in lockdown and not leaving their homes", a British expat said.

Videos of strikes had by then begun to be widely shared on social media and on WhatsApp chats. The Dubai authorities, however, wanted to maintain the perception of normality.

Residents were reportedly threatened with £40,000 fines for "spreading rumours", leading people to delete footage of the strikes from their devices.

Local TV news channels were hardly mentioning the strikes, locals said, and a message sent to phones ordered people to rely only on information provided by official government entities.

Anastasia, a Belarusian influencer and entrepreneur in Dubai, said she was trying to find out which buildings were hit but there was little information on TV news channels. Instead, she was trying to keep updated on "TikTok, Instagram or Twitter".

Tourists in Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital, reported hearing loud bangs throughout the day, with hotel staff at first handing out complimentary ice lollies to calm nerves.

As the day progressed visitors were told to stay inside to avoid shrapnel from intercepted missiles. Pictures released by the authorities showed a broken up rocket lying on a road.

Panic buying was later reported across the country, prompting the UAE's government to issue a statement reassuring residents of the nation's "robust" strategic reserves.

Luke Liversage was in a hotel room in Doha, Qatar, when he saw several missile interceptions outside his window.

He described a scene of carnage and confusion, with hotel staff crying. As his phone started to receive national emergency notifications he thought, "Am I actually being bombed here?"

The United Arab Emirates' interior ministry advised residents to "seek immediate shelter in the closest secure building" because of the "potential missile threats".

"Steer away from windows, doors, and open areas," it added.

Briton Phil Winster, who installs home cinemas, was staying in an apartment opposite America's Fifth Fleet Military base in Bahrain, which was also targeted in the bombardment.

He said friends in the US military warned him to evacuate just a few days before Iranian missiles struck. "We had no warning from anyone else. I know a few of the US military based there and they advised us to get out."

'We heard the shudder and the whole building shook. The area is covered in police now'

Where the missiles struck

Retaliation against Bahrain exposes frailty of US defences

By **Cameron Henderson**
and **Connor Stringer**

IRANIAN strikes on US military bases have exposed America's vulnerabilities in the region, military analysts have warned.

Following the onslaught against Iran in the early hours of yesterday morning, the Islamic Republic responded by firing waves of ballistic missiles at American bases in Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, and striking the US Navy 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain.

Footage of the blast at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Bahrain showed a large explosion with debris and a black cloud of smoke billowing along the island state's coastline.

Following the attack, the US military's Central Command confirmed forces had "suffered no combat casualties" as a result of Iran's retaliation.

"Damage to US installations was minimal and has not impacted operations," a spokesman added.

The retaliation is likely to raise questions about the resilience of US defences at the naval base and its ability to protect its allies in the Middle East.

"Inside the military, there's going to be a lot of head-scratching and finger-pointing and trying to figure out what happened," said Mark Cancian, a defence analyst at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

According to Mr Cancian, the explosion appeared to have been caused by an Iranian Shahed drone, which "should not be able to get through the air defences" because of the slow 115mph speed at which the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) travel.

"It's exposed something," he said. "It could be a systemic vulnerability, or it could be that someone just screwed up."

Given the strike did not appear to contain swarms of drones, in what is known as a saturation attack, and the length of time the US military had to

'Inside the military, there's going to be a lot of head-scratching and finger-pointing'

RAF Typhoons patrol the Middle East to keep British bases safe

By **Camilla Turner**
SUNDAY POLITICAL EDITOR

BRITISH military aircrafts are carrying out defensive patrols of the skies, Sir Keir Starmer said.

The Prime Minister said the UK's forces are "active" while protections for British bases and personnel have been stepped up "to their highest level" in response to the growing crisis in the Middle East.

The Telegraph understands that RAF Typhoon jets are patrolling the skies around Qatar while F-35B fighter jets have been dispatched from the UK's military base in Cyprus.

Speaking from Downing Street yesterday, Sir Keir said: "As part of our commitments to the security of our allies in the Middle East, we have a range of defensive capabilities in the region which we have recently strengthened.

"Our forces are active and British planes are in the sky today as part of coordinated regional defensive operations to protect our interest, and our allies , as Britain has done before in line with international law."

The strike on the US navy's 5th Fleet HQ in Bahrain is close to a British military base in Mina Salman Port.

Called the UK Naval Support Facility, it is home to around 150 British personnel and is key to running Britain's enduring mission in the Middle East, called Operation Kipion. A small number of British naval officers are also embedded within the US Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain.

'Our forces are active and British planes are in the sky to protect our interests'

It's unclear if there have been any British casualties this morning from the strike. The UK has reduced its naval presence in the Middle East in recent months.

The last frigate based at Bahrain, HMS Lancaster, was decommissioned just before Christmas. The sole UK naval vessel in the region is the minehunter HMS Middleton.

Sir Keir confirmed that the UK did not play a role in the US-Israel strikes on Iran, but added: "We have long been clear the regime in Iran is utterly abhorrent. They have murdered thousands of their own people, brutally crushed dissent and sought to destabilise the region."

The Prime Minister said the Iranian regime poses a "direct threat" to dissidents and to the Jewish community in the UK.

"Over the last year alone, they have backed more than 20 potentially lethal attacks on UK soil," he said.

He added that Iran must "never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon", saying: "They should refrain from further strikes, give up their weapons programmes, and cease the appalling violence and repression against the Iranian people – who deserve the right to determine their own future, in line with our longstanding position."

Sir Keir spoke to the leaders of Qatar and the UAE following Iranian strikes on both countries last night. In a call with the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Prime Minister expressed his "deep concern" about Iran's attacks and "reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the defence of Qatar and its allies".

'Over the last year alone, Iran has backed 20 attacks on UK soil'

A Downing Street spokesperson said: "They set out their shared resolve to find a path to de-escalation, working with allies to protect civilians and defend regional stability."

Speaking to Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE president, Sir Keir expressed "solidarity with the UAE and partners across the region in response to the loss of life, casualties and damage that has taken place".

Smoke rises on the skyline after an explosion in Tehran

An Iranian-made Shahed drone hit the hotel exterior

Explosions at five-star Palm Jumeirah Fairmont Hotel. An Iranian missile landed in a affluent area on the artificial Palm Jumeirah island

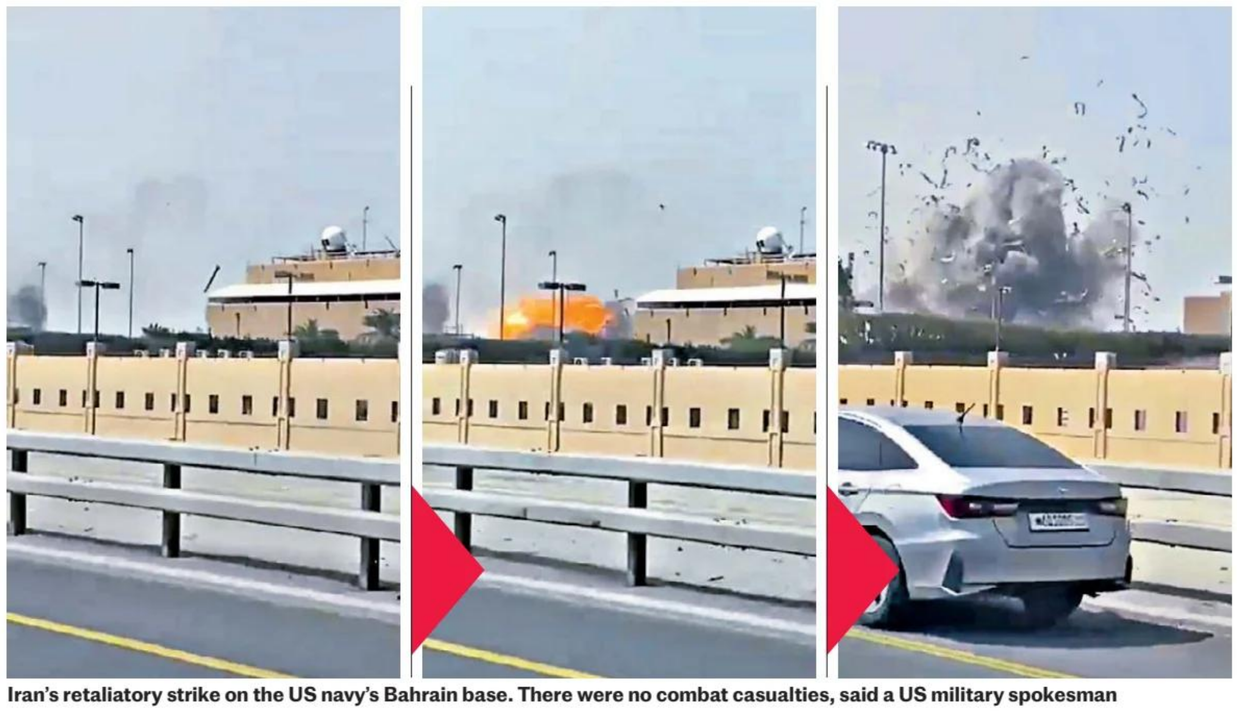
prepare for yesterday morning's assault, he said the bases should have robust air defence systems in place, including both long-range and short-range systems.

Michael Rubin, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, said the successful Iranian counter-strike was "a little bit embarrassing" and is likely to be used for Iranian propaganda.

Some experts believe the Bahraini base may have been sacrificed by US military chiefs as they withdrew destroyers and missile defence ships from the Gulf state for their own protection and prioritised higher-value installations.

"There are not a lot of missile defences in Bahrain," said Bryan Clark, a military analyst for the Hudson Institute. "[The US] moved them out because of the risk of getting attacked themselves. That's part of the reason for Bahrain maybe being hit."

Satellite images appeared to show that the US Navy withdrew all of its vessels from NSA Bahrain two days before launching what Donald Trump called a "major combat operation".



Iran's retaliatory strike on the US navy's Bahrain base. There were no combat casualties, said a US military spokesman

Mr Clark said it is likely that the base's estimated 9,000 personnel had been largely evacuated in anticipation of the strikes. "I'm not surprised that Bahrain would be the target that might have been hit because it has the least robust military defences," he said.

Whereas other bases in the region, such as Al Udeid air base in Qatar, are vital for launching aircraft and are therefore more heavily defended, he said that NSA Bahrain is a command and control base and is not essential to the US military campaign.

Following US strikes on three nuclear facilities in June 2025, Iran launched a barrage of missiles at the Al-Udeid base, setting off explosions in the nation's capital, Doha. All missiles were intercepted, and the attack resulted in no casualties.

Besides hitting the US military installation, Tehran struck civilian targets, including Kuwait's international airport, where several employees were wounded, and the UAE, where a civilian was killed by shrapnel.

Explosions have also been reported in Riyadh, the Saudi Arabian capital.

Iran has justified the strikes by claiming that "all bases, facilities and assets of the hostile forces in the region shall be regarded as legitimate military objectives within the framework of Iran's lawful exercise of self-defence".

"This is in part why some of those countries in the region didn't want US overflight or US operations from their bases," said Mr Clark."

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE had, in recent weeks, blocked the US from using their airspace for carrying out bombing raids against Tehran.

Mr Clark added: "They didn't want this attack to start in the region and cause instability, leading to these counter attacks against their countries."

A former Trump adviser said: "By having a base in a vulnerable region like that, there are always going to be risks. The difference is here is that this a much much bigger strike than anything previously..to that end, it's a much bigger threshold of risk."

In 2024, three US soldiers were killed in Jordan in a drone attack linked to the Iran-backed terrorist group Hezbollah.

Iran's neighbours united as Saudis support every state hit by regime

By **Melanie Swan**

IRAN'S attacks targeting six of its neighbours have inadvertently united the Middle East against the Islamic Republic, leaving it exposed in the Gulf.

The leaders of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, at loggerheads for some time, held a phone call after missiles struck the two nations yesterday.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told Mohammed bin Zayed that Saudi Arabia is ready "to place all its capabilities" at its neighbours' disposal, shortly before confirming attacks on its own soil.

Iran also targeted residential buildings, setting a five-star hotel in Dubai ablaze, hitting a tower block in Bahrain and striking a Kuwaiti airport, inviting further opprobrium in the region.

While many would not side with Israel, they believe Iran is a destabilising force and a danger to the region. Of the Gulf states, only Bahrain and the UAE have formal diplomatic ties with Israel, since the 2020 Abraham Accords.

Emirati political commentator, Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, told *The Telegraph* that Iran was the unifying threat bringing all Gulf Cooperation Council nations together, "regardless of differences".

He said: "When things get tough, they come together." Salman Al-Ansari, a Saudi geopolitical researcher, agreed that despite political differences, Saudi's stance to stand united with its Gulf allies comes first.

"Riyadh's security doctrine remains consistent even amid bilateral tensions with the UAE," he told *The Telegraph*.

"We must distinguish between principled commitments and bilateral disagreements. Saudi Arabia's approach to regional security is not transactional but foundational.

"The Kingdom has never spared, and will never spare, any effort to safeguard regional stability.

"As the leading pillar of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia engaged directly with the leadership of every state targeted by Iran, placing its full political and strategic weight behind their security."

> 'It's not just that Iran has united them, but it may push them towards more cooperation with the US'

Saudi foreign policy expert Aziz Algashian, said that the strikes will at least offer the chance to "mitigate tensions" between the UAE and Saudi, dislocating current frictions into an anchor of cooperation and solidarity.

He said that despite their differences over their involvement in Sudan and Yemen, they have always agreed on their approach to Iran. After a short hiatus, both the UAE and Saudi cautiously rekindled ties in the wake of the boycott on Iran triggered by an attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran in 2019, the UAE in 2022, and Saudi in 2023.

Dr Yoel Guzansky, senior fellow at the Israel National Institute of Security Studies, said that by attacking all of the Gulf countries, which had collectively worked to prevent an attack on Iran and temper Donald Trump, Iran will in fact have pushed them closer towards the US.

"It's not just that Iran has united them but may push them towards more cooperation with the US, now they have the legitimacy after being attacked," he said. "Saudi announced its military capabilities are there for the Gulf states, and they also said that when Israel attacked Qatar in September.

"It's a sign of solidarity.

"All of them are being attacked apart from Oman, as the mediator in the Iran-US talks, but there are some gaps between public statements and the true relationship."

Danny Citrinowicz, a former head of Israeli military intelligence and an Iran expert at Israel's Institute of National Security Studies, told *The Telegraph* that Saudi and the UAE now have a unified purpose to end the war, beyond escalation, with fears of Iran attacking the likes of tourism sites and critical infrastructure.

The Telegraph

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World rejoices at death of 'the devil'

Celebrations in Iran are mirrored by scenes of joy in cities across the globe from Berlin to Boston

By **Liz Perkins, Sabrina Miller** *and* **Akhtar Makoii**

ANTI-REGIME protesters tore down a statue of Khamenei in celebration at the fall of the Ayatollah.

Meanwhile, Iranians across the world celebrated the Ayatollah's downfall.

Loud cheers echoed from the rooftops and in the streets, celebratory music played, car horns were tooted and fireworks were set off across parts of the Iranian capital at around 11pm local time as the death was reported, despite the near-total internet blackout.

The Iranian disapora marked the moment by joyfully waving the country's flag and dancing at a London restaurant, while others were applauding.

Some in Tehran said: "The devil is dead, thank you US and Israel for standing on the right side of history."

In London, human rights activist Lily Moo told *The Telegraph* it was a moment to savour. She said: "I'm overjoyed and I'm celebrating by eating lots of sweet party food.

"I sprayed people with champagne outside the embassy when I found out the news. We're so happy it's like a numb feeling inside."

Footage showed people climbing a street sign to raise the former Shah's flag, while others shouted in celebration in London's Finchley neighbourhood, which is home to a large Iranian diaspora community.

Thousands of Iranians marched through central London towards the Iranian embassy where they called for a regime change from Khamenei to Prince Reza Pahlavi – the son of the exiled Shah – as others staged an anti-war protest in Parliament Square criticising Trump's attack.

One, in a post on X, said: "Everyone is out celebrating! What a wonderful day!"

Nader Fallah, who has previously given written evidence to a UK parliamentary committee regarding human rights breaches, the actions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and his concerns as a native of Iran, said: "Joy and euphoria.

"The bloodthirsty dictator and his murderous minions are no longer."

Iranian-American activist Masih Alinejad, in an interview with CBS, described it as a "day of celebration" as her compatriots celebrated in Boston held signs thanking US President Donald Trump for intervening as they clutched flags of the Republic of Iran, the US and Israel during a rally.

Dozens of people poured outside the Iranian embassy in Madrid at another rally in support of US and Israeli military intervention, which saw military bases and Tehran's regime targeted on Saturday morning.

People filled the square Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, Germany and staged a demonstration "Freedom for Iran" in the wake of the strikes.

A campaigner said: "We can smell freedom in the air. We needed a little help. Where was Britain? We will remember who stood with our people. Personally: I still have to pinch myself. Tears of joy when I hug my family and friends. Long live freedom."

The celebrations in across the world mirrored scenes inside Iran, where residents also took to the streets despite the Basij militia patrols deployed to prevent anti-regime demonstrations.

Jubilant scenes from around the world as news of the Supreme Leader's death spreads

Thousands of Iranians took to the streets dancing and celebrating following reports of Khamenei's death.

Footage showed widespread jubilation across multiple cities in Iran.

Video from southern Fars province showed people celebrating outside the home of Pouya Jafari, a 15-year-old boy killed by government forces on Jan 7 during protests.

"Am I dreaming? Hello new world!" people could be heard saying in the footage. Another video showed young people celebrating in Geledar city in Mehr district, Fars province. Elsewhere, Iranians blared music, cheered, clapped and honked their car horns, according to videos on Telegram verified by AFP.

The celebrations got under way before Trump's post, in response to other reports of Khamenei's death, shortly after 11pm local time (7.30pm GMT), according to multiple witnesses and audio recordings.

The witnesses said at the time loud cheers echoed across parts of Tehran and residents took to their windows to applaud and play loud music.

Loud and sustained whistles, cheers were heard and fireworks could be seen being launched on videos shared on social media that were verified by AFP.

'We can smell freedom in the air. We needed a little help'

At that point, people were not yet coming out en masse into the streets to celebrate, according to social media.

Many Iranians were fearful after the deadly crackdown on mass anti-government protests last month.

The initial wave of protests began in December, sparked by economic woes in the sanctions-hit country, but soon grew into nationwide demonstrations that crested on January 8 and 9, posing one of the largest challenges to Iran's leaders in years.

The unrest prompted a violent government crackdown that killed thousands of people. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has recorded more than 7,000 deaths, while warning the full toll is likely far higher.

Iranian officials acknowledge more than 3,000 deaths, but say the violence was caused by "terrorist acts" fuelled by the United States and Israel.

During the protests, the government had sought to walk a line between acknowledging protesters' legitimate economic grievances while condemning so-called "rioters".

Images of protesters from January's anti-government demonstrations were also shared on social media last night.

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Massacre of Iranians ensured the regime would be destroyed

Roland Oliphant
CHIEF FOREIGN ANALYST

NOT long ago, Donald Trump had little patience with the idea of full-scale wars with Iran.

The 12-day war between Israel and Iran last June, he said, could have "gone on for years and destroyed the entire Middle East" had he not told Benjamin Netanyahu that it had to stop.

Eight months later, Mr Trump has ordered a full-scale bombing campaign aimed at nothing less than the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran itself. This time, he and Netanyahu seem to be working hand-in-hand on the same project.

What changed? And how did he amass a force for one of the most ambitious and risky American wars since the 2003 invasion of Iraq?

This is not the first time Mr Trump has contemplated attacking – or even invading – Iran. In 2020, after the assassination of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps strongman Qassim Soleimani, US forces were put on 24-hour notice to invade the country, says Jonathan Hackett, a former US marine intelligence official based at the US embassy in Jordan at the time.

That plan was a knee-jerk response to Iran striking at US forces in Syria following the assassination, and was never put into action.

"But between Trump one and Trump two, the way that they're approaching this is more deliberate. A lot of what they're doing is planned much further in advance than it was during Trump one," says Mr Hackett.

The plan put into action yesterday morning was not dreamt up "in the last three weeks, and it didn't come up in January when the regime murdered the protesters. This plan was likely to have been in the works since at least six months ago", he adds.

Publicly, however, the impetus for o an actual force build-up came only last month.

In the first weeks of the year, large crowds built on the streets of Iran, responding to a call from Reza Pahlavi, the exiled crown prince, to rise up against the regime.

The regime responded with the bloodiest domestic crackdown in its 47-year history, gunning down protesters and killing detainees in custody in a bid to crush the insurrection. Up to 30,000 people were killed.

"Trump saw the images of the protesters. He saw that they were getting killed. He was moved by it. [Senator] Lindsey Graham was in his ear saying, 'bomb Iran', and Trump almost did it on January 14," says Holly Dagres, an Iranian-American political scientist and author of *The Iranist*, a newsletter on Iranian current affairs.

"But then Israel and Saudi Arabia and maybe Qatar called him up and said 'you don't have enough assets to defend us in the region. Don't do this'. And they called it off," says Dagres.

At that point, the president seems to have charged his military with getting the required assets into theatre.

The man in charge of the planning this time is General Dan Caine, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. Gen Caine is known as a disciple of the doctrine espoused by Colin Powell, the chairman of the joint chiefs during the first Gulf war. Powell insisted the US should only go to war with precise political goals, clear public support, and decisive force. He also insisted that all non-military avenues should have been exhausted before war was contemplated.

The relentless hail of missiles over Tehran begins

Once Mr Trump set the objective – destruction of the Iranian regime – Gen Caine seems to have done his best to assemble the kind of decisive action Mr Powell would have called for.

On Jan 26, nearly two weeks after Mr Trump tried to launch a war against Iran, the USS Abraham Lincoln arrived in the Arabian Sea with its strike group of destroyers, missile cruisers and support vessels. By the beginning of last week, there were more US forces in the Middle East than at any time since the invasion of Iraq.

More than 50 fighter jets were moved to the region in 24 hours. By Thursday, at least 14 US refuelling aircraft had arrived at Israel's Ben Gurion airport. On Friday, the last piece of the jigsaw – the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R Ford – arrived off the Israeli coast.

Suppressing the Iranian response will also require hitting as many military and political decision-makers as possible, destroying the ballistic missiles and their launch vehicles, and preventing the Iranian navy from closing the Strait of Hormuz or – even more dramatically – hitting or even sinking an American ship.

Meanwhile, there was almost certainly unseen, covert activity going on inside Iran, says Mr Hackett.

"For example, providing Starlink terminals to several thousand Iranians, so that during the expected protests, which will happen, they'll be able to communicate with the outside world.

"Then ensuring that those terminals couldn't be jammed, which is, again, another thing that you can't do organically – that has to come from covert action," he says.

Concurrent with the military build-up was a diplomatic back and forth. US-Iranian diplomacy froze from the moment Israel launched Operation Rising Lion – its name for the 12-day war – in June. Afterwards, neither side seemed interested in resuming talks, says Nicholas Hopton, a former British ambassador to Iran.

The US saw little reason to engage now that Iran's ability to enrich uranium to weapons grade had been catastrophically damaged. The Iranians did not want to talk under what they considered to be duress.

That changed after the Iranian regime massacred protesters on Jan 8 and 9. After Mr Trump made several threats to strike the regime, talks resumed between the US and Iran in Geneva in early February.

As the talks dragged on, Gen Caine's military build-up continued. There is evidence that Mr Trump was hoping that the mere spectacle of might could cow Iran into concessions on its nuclear and ballistic programmes.

At this point, war might still have been averted if the two sides had not utterly failed to understand one another.

"To put it very simply, Trump doesn't understand Iran. He doesn't have smart people to explain Iran to him, and he thinks that this is a business deal, and if he bullies people into a deal he'll get what he wants," says Ms Dagres. "But he doesn't understand the mentality of this ideological regime, their whole modus operandi, is to oppose the United States and Israel, and that they'd rather be martyred and face death than give in to these demands."

The Iranians, she argues, were equally "dumb and naive" in thinking "they could just finagle their way out of it" as they have in the past.

"They haven't adjusted to the post-Oct 7 world dynamics; they haven't understood that you shouldn't be relying on your old playbook – Israel and the United States are not going to tolerate your bad behaviour any more."

Ms Dagres, who has been following Iranian affairs every day for years, believes many commentators are still naive about just how impulsive Mr Trump is. There is every reason, she believes, to think a deal could have been done.

There is a possibility, however, that the diplomatic track was merely cover for a course of action on which Mr Trump had already decided.

Two weeks ago, claimed Mr Hackett, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his top officials were offered an "Assad solution" – leave for exile in Russia. Khamanei, apparently, refused point blank. *The Telegraph* was unable to immediately confirm that claim.

The subsequent US insistence that Iran give up its ballistic missiles as well as its uranium enrichment, says Mr Hackett, was a demand Washington must have known could never be met.

"I mean, if they did, it wouldn't be the regime any more, because what are they going to defend themselves with?" he said, speaking a few hours before the American attack began.

"I think the US has purposely selected this as a red line topic because it's the way that we're going to use to justify moving forward."

Labour slow to back US move amid legal concern

Farage and Badenoch on board but influential MP Thornberry says raids may break international law

By **Camilla Turner** *and* **Sabrina Miller**

NIGEL FARAGE and Kemi Badenoch have backed Donald Trump's strikes on Iran after Labour MPs claimed that they were in breach of international law.

Mr Farage, the Reform UK leader, urged the Prime Minister to allow the use of British military bases and "support the Americans in this vital fight".

Mrs Badenoch, the Tory leader, said she "stands with our allies in the US and Israel" as they "take on the threat" of Iran. Writing on social media, she condemned the Iranian regime "that carries out attacks on the UK and on our citizens, that seeks to build nuclear weapons that would threaten our country and that brutally repressed pro-democracy protests only months ago and murdered thousands of its own people".

She added: "Under my leadership, the Conservative Party will always put our national security first and work with our allies to make the world a safer place."

> 'They [the US] were not under imminent threat so it's difficult to see what is the legal justification'

The strikes follow weeks of military build-up in the Middle East as the Trump administration assembled a huge fleet of warships and fighter jets to pressure Iran into a nuclear deal.

Meanwhile, Israel's defence minister declared a "special and permanent state of emergency" as Iran launched barrages of retaliatory missiles towards Israel, while also targeting US airbases in several Middle Eastern countries including Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE.

However, Dame Emily Thornberry, Labour's chairman of the Commons foreign affairs select committee, responded to the crisis by saying she believed America and Israel's initial strikes broke international law. .

Dame Emily, who has previously served as shadow attorney general, said there was no "imminent threat" posed by Tehran. "I don't think that there's a legal basis for this action," she told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme. "They were not under imminent threat and so it's, therefore, difficult to see what the legal justification is."

Earlier, Mr Trump announced that the US and Israel had embarked on "massive and ongoing" combat operations. "Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime," he said, adding that Washington's aim was to "ensure that Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon".

Zack Polanski, the Green Party leader described the strikes as an "illegal, unprovoked and brutal attack" adding that the US and Israel are now "rogue states". Sir Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader, said Britain must not be "dragged into" another Middle Eastern war, adding: "Keir Starmer needs to rule out the use of UK bases for any future unilateral US strikes ... the Iranian people deserve to live free from a brutal regime.

> 'We stand ready to protect our interests. We do not want to see escalation into a wider regional conflict'

"Donald Trump's unilateral and illegal military action won't deliver freedom, peace and security. It will only unleash more bloodshed."

Meanwhile, Your Party – led by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana – said the UK should call for "an immediate halt to the attack" and suspend arms sales and supplies to Israel and the US.

The Government said: "Iran must never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon and that is why we have continually supported efforts to reach a negotiated solution. Our immediate priority is the safety of UK nationals in the region and we will provide them with consular assistance, available 24/7.

"As part of our long-standing commitments to the security of our allies in the Middle East, we have a range of defensive capabilities in the region, which we have recently bolstered. We stand ready to protect our interests. We do not want to see further escalation into a wider regional conflict."

Telephone diplomacy Benjamin Netanyahu on a call with Donald Trump after Israel and the US began striking Iran. On his desk is a copy of *Allies at War* by Tim Bouverie, an account of how Britain, the US and the Soviet Union defeated the Nazis during the Second World War.

Starmer urged to ban 'web of groups' that backs dictatorship

By **Camilla Turner**
SUNDAY POLITICAL EDITOR

SIR KEIR STARMER has been urged to clamp down on charities accused of operating as part of an Iranian influence "network" in Britain.

A group of Labour MPs have warned of a web of organisations are "appear to be actively promoting the Iranian regime's ideology and interests".

In a letter to Dan Jarvis, the security minister, the MPs argue that proscribing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is an "important step" in limiting the regime's ability to repress and kill protesters in Iran.

They go on to list several charities which they allege are part of the Iranian regime's "influence on our shores", arguing that the response of the Charity Commission has been "inadequate".

One charity they cite is the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), which describes itself as a campaign, research and advocacy non-profit which "struggles for justice for all peoples". Set up in 1997, it has special consultative status with the economic and social council of the United Nations. It has been under a statutory inquiry by the Charity Commission since last October. It was criticised in the 2023 independent review of the Prevent counter-terror strategy. Sir William Shawcross described it as an "Islamist group ideologically aligned with the Iranian regime, that has a history of extremist links and terrorist sympathies".

The official report notes: "Several senior figures within IHRC have espoused support for violent jihad, expressed sympathy for convicted terrorists, and advocated for the extraction and eradication of 'Zionists'."

The letter also mentions the Islamic Centre for England, which has been under investigation by the Charity Commission since 2022.

Based in Maida Vale, north-west London, the Islamic Centre of England is accused of being an outpost of the Iranian regime. It first sparked concern in 2020, when it held a candlelit vigil for Soleimani of the IRGC. During the vigil, he was referred to as a "dedicated soldier of Islam" and a "great martyr".

Expressing support for the dead general exposed the centre to the risk of being charged with committing a terrorist offence. The vigil – along with another event at the centre that "eulogised" Soleimani – led to an official warning by the charity watchdog.

In October 2022, Seyed Hashem Moosavi, the centre's director, gave a speech in which he described Iranian protesters against the regime as "enemies" and "soldiers of Satan". He also said women who refused to wear hijabs were guilty of spreading "poison".

The following month, the Charity Commission launched a statutory inquiry that could ultimately lead to the centre being stripped of its charitable status. The investigation is ongoing.

A spokesman for the Islamic Centre for England said: "The Centre does not represent, promote, or advocate for the political views or agendas of any state, figure or regime. Its religious guidance is confined to matters of faith, ethics, and spirituality."

They added: "All activities of the Centre are aligned with its charitable aims, to promote religious education, culture, moral guidance, and social cohesion, within the framework of UK law."

The Government was also approached for comment.

Surge in oil prices could wreak havoc on British economy

By **Hans van Leeuwen**
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS EDITOR

OIL prices could jump as high as $100 a barrel if the US conflict with Iran does not end quickly, wreaking havoc on the global economy.

As missiles fly over one of the world's major choke points for oil and gas, Brent crude could surge from the current $73 a barrel – with gas prices following suit.

That would stoke inflation in Britain, sapping economic growth and potentially pushing up interest rates. Wider disruptions to commercial shipping and air freight could stack further costs on the UK economy, creating a major headache for Rachel Reeves as she prepares for her Spring Statement on Tuesday.

"Even if strikes remain limited, we think Brent crude oil prices might rise to about $80 per barrel," said William Jackson of Capital Economics. "But oil prices would rise much further if the conflict is prolonged and, in particular, if it affects actual oil supply... A rise in Brent to $100 per barrel could add 0.6 to 0.7 points to global inflation, and natural gas prices would probably increase too."

Oil markets predicting the future direction of prices will not open until late tonight, but a gauge of West Texas Intermediate crude prices jumped 12pc yesterday. Donald Trump's attack does not solely hit one of the world's largest oil producers. It will draw in almost all the Middle East's major energy players, and will send shockwaves throughout the global shipping industry.

Iran has launched retaliatory missile strikes on major oil and gas-producing countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Airspace across the region has been shut down.

Maersk, the shipping giant, is re-routing commercial container vessels away from the Suez and onto the more expensive detour around Africa.

Tankers can potentially continue sailing through the Strait of Hormuz, which carries about one-fifth of the world's oil and gas shipments, worth more than $1.3bn (£964m).

But Bloomberg and Reuters have reported that many tankers are piling up inside and outside the strait, indicating that shipping firms are hesitant to risk travelling through. Some reports are suggesting the Iranians are telling vessels the strait is closed. Meanwhile, the US and Israel may be targeting Iran's oil supplies at source.

Iranian news agencies reported explosions on Kharg Island, which hosts a large oil terminal responsible for most of Iran's oil exports. Iran produces about 4pc of the world's oil, making it the fourth-largest supplier in the Opec cartel of oil-producing nations.

Estimates vary, but last year's total may have been as much as 4.7 million barrels a day of crude and condensate – another oil product – earning the regime more than $70bn. About 90pc of this is bought by China. The Chinese would immediately have to look to the wider world market to find replacement flows for the lost Iranian supplies, driving up global prices. Just as Chinese demand climbs, worldwide supplies may tighten because Gulf countries also rely on the Strait of Hormuz.

If the strait became impassable, even for a short time, prices could quickly skyrocket. If the Iranians somehow pulled off a blockade, Bridget Payne, from Oxford Economics, predicts that prices would spike to $100 a barrel.

Mr Trump is looking to prevent Iran from closing the strait, vowing to sink the entire Iranian navy. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the regular navy and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp between them operate almost 40 battlecraft, 100-plus patrol boats and stockpiles of naval drones. Iran also has a fleet of 18 submarines that will be harder to find and destroy, and which could hinder commercial shipping and threaten US naval operations.

Iran crisis to trigger oil price spike

Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, warned yesterday that Iran would use "all its defensive and military capabilities under legitimate right of self-defence".

The IRGC has reportedly kicked off an attempt to shut the Strait of Hormuz. But even if it succeeds, Payne reckons they would struggle to keep the blockade going for more than a week.

After the Strait reopened – or even if it never shuts at all – disruption and disorder would linger during "a messy aftermath". Payne says this would keep the price well above $80.

Capital Economics says the "rule of thumb" is that every 5pc increase in the oil price feeds through into a 0.1 percentage point boost to inflation in major economies such as the UK.

Price increases wouldn't just make it more expensive to fill a car. Higher freight and delivery costs would push up prices at farm gates and in supermarkets. Air fares would rise. The next price cap announcement for gas bills could be more painful. All this could be enough to prevent the Bank of England from delivering the interest rate cut that is expected this month.

It may also stay the hand of the US Federal Reserve. Mr Trump has been exerting heavy pressure on the central bank to reduce interest rates further and faster.

Higher input costs would eat into British corporate profits. This would reduce the Government's tax revenue, and potentially put more pressure on the UK's beleaguered jobs market.

Meanwhile, more public money and resources may need to be scrambled to protect UK military assets in the Middle East – even if Britain does not become directly involved in the US action.

This will have Ms Reeves and the Office for Budget Responsibility hastily reworking their estimates and forecasts over the weekend.

She and Sir Keir Starmer may discover they have less fiscal headroom to offer spending increases. That will make it harder to placate a restive Labour Party, putting yet more pressure on his embattled leadership.

Mr Trump's action may be existentially bad news for the regime in Tehran. But it will probably be a significant setback, too, for the regime in Downing Street.

Minister quits over 'smear campaign'

Josh Simons was behind investigation of journalists asking awkward questions about Labour think tank

By **Camilla Turner**

A CABINET Office minister has resigned over an alleged smear campaign against journalists by a Labour think tank.

Josh Simons was the director of Labour Together in 2023 when it paid a public affairs firm to investigate the "backgrounds and motivations" of journalists researching the sources of its funding.

He left the think tank, which was central to Sir Keir Starmer's rise to power, in 2024 and joined the Prime Minister's Cabinet after the general election.

Yesterday, Sir Keir published an exchange of letters with Mr Simons that confirmed he had accepted the minister's resignation.

In his investigation into the alleged smear campaign, Sir Laurie Magnus, the independent adviser on ministerial standards, found that Mr Simons had not breached the ministerial code.

However, Sir Laurie said: "You will wish to consider, in the light of this distraction and potential reputational damage, whether he continues to hold your confidence as a member of your Government."

In his resignation letter, Mr Simons said: "I welcome that Sir Laurie Magnus has cleared me of breaching the ministerial code. It was important to me to complete this process to prove that I behaved with integrity and that my public statements have been truthful and honest.

"Nonetheless, it is clear that my remaining in office has now become a distraction from this Government's important work. For that reason, and with sadness and regret, I offer my resignation."

Mr Simons was accused of paying a PR firm £36,000 to investigate the "sourcing, funding and origins" of a *Sunday Times* article about Labour Together, as well as the authors of an upcoming book by Paul Holden and Matt Taibbi.

Josh Simons said he was a 'distraction from this Government's important work'

The PR firm's report labelled newspaper journalists who had reported on the think-tank's undeclared funding as "persons of interest" and looked into their personal, religious and political backgrounds.

The Cabinet Office's propriety, ethics and constitution group has since launched an investigation into Labour Together.

The allegations surrounding the Cabinet Office minister's potential role in the smear campaign became the latest in a series of scandals under Sir Keir's administration.

Last year, the Prime Minister was forced to sack Lord Mandelson over his links to Jeffrey Epstein and accept the resignation of Angela Rayner over underpaid stamp duty.

Sir Keir said he accepted Mr Simons' resignation with "sadness" and expressed his thanks for the "commitment, focus and energy" that he brought to the role.

Mr Simons explained in his resignation letter that he never intended to smear newspaper reporters, but instead sought to investigate how confidential material had been disclosed, and whether it was the result of a hack.

"I talked to my board, hired expert lawyers, and commissioned a firm – APCO – who said they had relevant cyber-security expertise," he said.

"I also filed an official case with the National Cybersecurity Centre so they could establish the facts, who met with Labour Together and thanked us for filing the case. Given the concerns I had, it would have been irresponsible not to do these things."

He said he did not know that journalists would be labelled as "persons of interest" and did not expect the APCO report to include "reprehensible" material.

Allies of Mr Simons said he had wanted to investigate what he thought was a potentially illegal hack and "deeply regrets" what happened.

"Josh has done the responsible thing to resign to end the distraction, putting the interests of the party first."

Blair berates Labour for keeping young out of work

By **Tim Wallace**
DEPUTY ECONOMICS EDITOR

LABOUR'S policies are harming growth and undermining young people's job prospects, Sir Tony Blair has warned.

In his most damning intervention to date, the former prime minister's think tank took aim at a raft of Labour's flagship policies, criticising decisions to raise the minimum wage, employers' National Insurance contributions and add more workers' rights red tape.

The Tony Blair Institute (TBI), the think tank which he runs, said Labour should reverse course on a string of workforce policies as the economy struggles and unemployment surges.

The warning comes at a critical time for Sir Keir Starmer, who is under increasing pressure from the Left of his party in the wake of humiliating defeat in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

The TBI cautioned that a series of Left-wing policies were already putting the brakes on growth. It will be seen as a critical intervention ahead of Tuesday's Spring Statement by Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor.

Sir Tony introduced the minimum wage in his first term in No 10. However, his think tank said excessive increases in the rate now risk preventing young people from getting their first job.

"The risk is that further rises – including raising the youth rate for under-21s to match the over-21s rate – will discourage firms from taking a chance on new employees, particularly younger workers," said the TBI report.

"Set too high, a wage floor can erode the first rung on the career ladder."

The warning comes after the unemployment rate for 16 to 24-year-olds rose to 16.1pc, a higher level than anything suffered in the pandemic and a rate not seen for more than a decade.

Sir Mel Stride, the shadow chancellor, said the TBI warning was telling. "When even Tony Blair's Institute is warning Britain has lost its economic dynamism, it's clear the Chancellor has run out of road," he said.

OLIVER DIXON

In the pink Alex Hankey, the garden manager at RHS Garden Wisley, admires a stunning camellia – RHS is predicting explosions of floral colour in gardens over next two weeks as rising temperatures coax spring favourites into bloom

Britons in Gibraltar regain EU freedom of movement

By **James Badcock** IN MADRID *and* **James Crisp**

BRITISH citizens in Gibraltar will regain lost EU freedom of movement rights under the Rock's new Brexit deal.

Residents will win back the right to work in the EU as if they were citizens of the bloc under the EU-UK treaty.

Gibraltarians will be able to freely cross the border into Spain and take employment there with equal rights as Spaniards, privileges lost when Brexit took practical effect in 2020.

José Manuel Albares, the Spanish foreign minister, celebrated the "fall of the last wall in Europe".

Under the terms of the treaty between the EU and UK, UK nationals and their family members who legally reside in Gibraltar "shall have a right to take up and pursue an activity as an employed frontier worker in the kingdom of Spain".

Gibraltar residents will be allowed to enter Spain on a daily basis for work, just as EU citizens will continue to be able to work in Gibraltar. The deal means that land border checkpoints between Gibraltar and Spain will be removed, probably this spring.

The absence of passport checks will allow effective free movement across the land border for UK residents of Gibraltar, although technically the treaty includes a limit on stays of 90 days every six months in the Schengen space including Spain. The deal means passports do not have to be stamped. Gibraltarians will not have to use the EU's new entry/exit system, which comes into force on April 10.

Under the agreement, Spanish border police will screen entrants to Gibraltar's airport alongside Gibraltar police and Spain will have the right to block the issuance of a Gibraltar residency permit to any individual it deems a threat. But UK citizens in Gibraltar will not be allowed to live or study in the EU, as they could before Brexit.

The Left-wing government of Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish prime minister, parked the country's historical sovereignty claim to the Rock. Instead, it sought an agreement that would trigger greater economic activity in the neighbouring area, known as Campo de Gibraltar, where unemployment is consistently above 25 per cent.

Every day, 15,000 cross-border workers enter Gibraltar from Spain, usually passing quickly through the border control by flashing special cards. But the inflow of workers into Gibraltar could become more balanced if the deal fosters growth on the Spanish side.

"With this agreement we change the relationship between Gibraltar and Campo de Gibraltar with a focus on cooperation and shared prosperity," Mr Albares said.

Most goods will be able to pass freely across the border thanks to a customs union as part of the treaty but Spanish and EU negotiators sought to ensure that Gibraltar will not be able to export food or medicine into Spain.

As part of a safeguard to protect single market rules and stop food and drugs moving into Spain, pre-packaged food made under non-EU standards must be marked "not for EU" and medicines labelled "UK only".

The Gibraltar deal comes as Sir Keir Starmer seeks closer alignment with the single market and deeper security cooperation with the bloc.

"Starmer is trying to slide the UK back into the UK, agreement by agreement, it's a conspiracy as he makes it clear the EU is helping him every step of the way," Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Tory leader, told *The Telegraph* earlier this week.

Maldives explores legal fight over Chagos deal

By **Samaan Lateef** *and* **Sabrina Miller**

THE Maldives is preparing to fight Britain's Chagos Islands giveaway in a move that could collapse the deal.

A Maldivian Foreign Office spokesperson confirmed that the country was "exploring options" on a legal challenge to Sir Keir Starmer's plans to cede sovereignty of the islands to Mauritius.

The Maldives asserts a territorial claim over the archipelago, which it believes supersedes the claim made by its Mauritian neighbours.

A spokesman for the Maldivian government told *The Telegraph* Britain's plans were not "adequately grounded in international legal principles".

It is the latest stumbling block for Sir Keir Starmer's deal, which now lies in the balance after Donald Trump said the Chagos islands "should not be taken away from the UK" and that a giveaway to Mauritius would be "a blight on our great ally". He has previously called Britain's plans an act of "great stupidity", although has changed his stance on the issue on several occasions.

It is understood Britain cannot go ahead with the deal without the blessing of America, which operates a military base jointly with Britain – Diego Garcia – on the islands. The Maldivian Government said it had launched a legal review into the deal and, while no formal action had yet been taken, was assessing "all lawful avenues available" to halt the transfer.

> 'Chagos is our land. The Maldives has better claims to the islands and we have a legal right to this land'

A spokesman for the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said: "At present, the Maldives has not formally instituted proceedings at the International Court of Justice against any State concerning sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. We are exploring our options now.

"We are doing a comprehensive legal review and consultations with international legal experts and relevant domestic authorities are ongoing." They added that the Government of the Maldives has formally expressed its diplomatic objections to the deal; directly with the British Government, writting to the UK in November 2024 and more recently in January 2026.

It is understood these correspondence outllined the Maldives' concerns with the arrangement and its implications for regional maritime boundaries and historical rights.

Azima Shakoor, a former Attorney General of Maldives involved in Chagos advocacy, added: "Chagos is our land and it should be returned to us. The Maldives has better claims to the Chagos Islands and we have a legal right to this land.

"The British Govt should respect this right of the Maldivians and completely stop the process of handing over Chagos to Mauritius so as to give time for the Maldives to use the international legal framework to establish its legal rights."

The British Foreign Office has been contacted for comment.

JOANN RANDLES/HIVE INSIDER

Floral dance Welsh folk dancer Alaw Evans, 18, sees in St David's Day at Newcastle Emlyn castle, Carmarthenshire.

NEWS BULLETIN

Ben Nevis walker's body found after three years

The family of a walker reported missing three years ago have been informed after human remains were found on Ben Nevis.

Harvey Christian, 42, from Cambridgeshire, was reported missing from the Fort William area where it was understood he planned to climb Ben Nevis on January 27 2023.

Family raised the alarm after he failed to return from his trip and his car was later found parked in a layby in Glen Nevis in the Scottish Highlands.

Police Scotland said that human remains were found on the south side of Ben Nevis yesterday.

A spokesman said: "There are not believed to be any suspicious circumstances."

Asylum seeker's fake dynamite protest at MI5

A failed asylum seeker caused a terror alert by leaving a fake stick of dynamite outside the headquarters of MI5 after being told he would be kicked out of the country.

Brazilian Julian Valente Pereira, 32, staged a protest at the secret services base in central London.

CCTV footage shows Pereira stuffing paperwork about his immigration case through the doors, before retrieving the "dynamite" from his bag.

Officers discovered it was a crudely made fake.

He was found guilty of carrying out a bomb hoax by City of London magistrates and remanded into custody until sentencing on April 1. He was warned that he may be jailed.

Kaye Adams will not return to radio show

Broadcaster Kaye Adams will not be returning to her *Mornings With* BBC Scotland radio show.

Adams was taken off air from the programme in October, a decision reportedly made following allegations about her behaviour.

BBC Scotland said the *Mornings With* line-up would remain as it is for the moment with Connie McLaughlin presenting on Mondays to Wednesdays, and Stephen Jardine on Thursdays and Fridays.

The BBC said it does not comment on any internal processes involving individuals. Adams has been approached for comment.

Rifle man, 80, arrested after woman, 83, injured

An 80-year-old man who was arrested after an 83-year-old woman was seriously injured in an alleged firearm incident has been released on bail, police said.

Officers were called to an address in Monks Eleigh, Suffolk, after reports that a woman had been injured after a firearm was discharged. She is serious but stable at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge. The firearm is believed to be an air weapon, said Suffolk Police.

The 80-year-old man arrested at the scene on suspicion of grievous bodily harm has now been released on bail, with conditions to return to police on March 27, the force added.

Man on mobility scooter spotted on motorway

A man in his 70s has been taken home by police after he was spotted driving a mobility scooter on the motorway, a force has said.

Essex Police said they were called to reports of a man who had accidentally turned onto the M11 at Harlow in the vehicle and was seen driving along the hard shoulder at around 12.35pm on Friday.

Officers attended the scene to make sure the driver was safe and closed one lane briefly while they transferred him into a police vehicle before taking him and the scooter home.

The force said it was a "great reminder to only use suitable vehicles on our major roads".

MATT

'It's the Commons Speaker. He suspects the PM will flee the UK and fly to some pointless foreign summit'

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The Daily Telegraph, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 0DT

Clean sweep for Olivia Dean, Queen of the Brits

London singer wins artist of the year, best album, top song and leading pop act at Manchester celebration

By **Emily Smith**

ENGLISH rising star Olivia Dean swept the Brit Awards last night.

London-born Dean won four of the five prizes for which she was nominated – emerging as the ceremony's leading artist.

The 26-year-old soul-pop singer won Artist of the Year and Pop Act, while her LP *The Art of Loving* won Mastercard Album of the Year.

She also shared Song of the Year with North Shields-born indie-rock singer Sam Fender for their duet *Rein Me In* at the Manchester ceremony.

Her near-clean sweep comes weeks after Dean was named Best New Artist at the Grammy Awards, the first British artist to do so since 2019.

Dean, who grew up in Highams Park, north-east London, first gained attention with a run of independently released EPs before her 2023 debut album *Messy* reached the UK charts.

Her singles *Dive* and *Be My Own Boyfriend* both took off on social media platforms, and established her as a successful new voice in British pop.

She released her second album, *The Art of Loving*, in September 2025.

It debuted at number one on the UK charts, making it the first record by a British female solo artist to do so since Adele.

Elsewhere at the Brit Awards, Lola Young, the *Messy* singer, was named Breakthrough Artist of the Year, whilst Wolf Alice won Group of the Year.

In the International Song of the Year category, Bruno Mars and South Korean singer Rosé took the prize, reflecting the continued rise of K-pop, partly influenced by the popular film *KPop Demon Hunters*. Ozzy Osbourne, who died of a heart attack in July, was also honoured with a lifetime achievement award for his "remarkable legacy" as founding member and frontman of Black Sabbath.

Dean, who has frequently drawn comparisons to Adele, was a pupil of the BRIT school, just like the *Someone Like You Singer*.

The Croydon performing arts school also boasts alumni such as Amy Winehouse and Jessie J.

Brought up in a musical family and inspired by her cousin, So Solid Crew rapper Ashley Walters, Dean knew by age eight that she wanted to be a singer, and has previously spoken about starting her songwriting career as a teenager.

She took musical theatre lessons, sang in a gospel choir, and competed in school performances.

Speaking to the BBC, she recalled her father introducing her to artists such as Carole King and Al Green, and her mother introducing her to Jill Scott and Lauryn Hill.

Her grandmother also took her to buy her first CD, Leona Lewis's *A Moment Like This*.

Reflecting on her rise, she told *the Standard*: "I keep thinking they're gonna find out that I'm just this random person from east London and I'm not actually the pop star they think I am, just a random girl that lives in Deptford."

In her Grammy acceptance speech, she said: "I never really imagined that I would be up here, let alone nominated, so thank you so much."

She also reflected on her family background, as her grandmother, whom she sings about in her hit *Carmen*, immigrated to the UK aged 18 from Guyana.

She said: "I'm up here as a granddaughter of an immigrant. I'm a product of bravery, and I think those people ought to be celebrated."

JMENTERNATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

'I keep thinking they're gonna find out that I'm just this random person from east London and I'm not actually the pop star they think I am'

Olivia Dean performs at the Brit Awards in Manchester last night

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Farage: we must ban Commonwealth voters

Reform leader says those from Pakistan, India and other nations should not take part in our elections

By **Camilla Turner**
SUNDAY POLITICAL EDITOR

NIGEL FARAGE has called for Commonwealth citizens to be banned from voting in British elections.

The Reform UK leader said that only naturalised British citizens should be allowed to vote, while those from Pakistan, India, and other nations should lose the privilege.

The current rules allow Commonwealth citizens to register and vote in UK elections, provided they meet residents or leave-to-remain conditions.

But Mr Farage argues that this undermines national sovereignty and leads to elections being fought on international issues rather than domestic ones.

His warning follows claims of illegal family voting in the Gorton and Denton by-election which are being assessed by police.

Mr Farage has accused Muslim voters of cheating to elect the Green Party in the constituency, which has a large British-Pakistani population, claiming the result was a victory for "sectarian" politics.

Writing for *the Telegraph*, Mr Farage said there was something "fundamentally wrong" with the way British elections are conducted, adding that the alleged issues of the Gorton and Denton by-election must not be repeated.

He said: "Allowing non-Brits – people with zero connection to this country – to vote on our future is absurd. It is right that only British citizens should be able to vote in British parliamentary elections." Mr Farage also called for mass postal voting to be axed to save British democracy from "corruption".

He said postal votes are potentially a "rich seam for fraudsters to mine" and should be scaled back drastically to prevent their abuse.

Labelling the reports of family voting in Gorton and Denton as a "monstrous attack on democracy", he said this should "open up a bigger and more fundamental debate about our electoral system.

"If that level of pressure was being applied at the polling booths, can you even imagine the levels of coercion that might take place around postal voting at home?"

He said that ministers must radically scale back postal voting so that it is only an option available to those who "genuinely cannot vote in person on the day" such as the elderly and infirm, or those who are away on holiday, working abroad or serving overseas in the armed forces. Arguments about the convenience of postal voting should not matter. This is about the corruption of our

> 'Allowing non-Brits, with zero connection to this country, to vote on our future is absurd'

democracy," he said. "But you should need to have a good reason to request a postal vote, backed up by documentary evidence."

Postal voting was first introduced for people serving in the armed forces shortly after World War I. It was extended to certain categories of civilians in 1948, and expanded in 1985. Under Sir Tony Blair's government in 2000, postal votes were made available on demand, to anyone who requested them. "I'm imploring the Government, a Labour Government that until now might have benefited from mass postal voting, to think again," he said.

"Parliament needs to do something drastic to clear up the democratic system. For a start, we should scrap the postal voting register as it exists for the May 7th elections. Then allow people if they wish to apply for their own postal vote."

Mr Farage added that local police forces should play a more prominent role in ensuring that returning officers are enforcing the law on family voting in polling stations.

He added that "we need to think very hard" about whether Commonwealth citizens should have the right to vote in British parliamentary elections.

On Friday, Labour lost the by-election in Gorton and Denton, coming third behind the Greens and Reform in a major blow to Sir Keir Starmer.

Sir Keir rejected fresh demands from Labour MPs and unions for him to quit, vowing to fight on and accusing the Green Party of "sectarian" politics.

The fallout continued yesterday, with senior Labour figures wading in.

The Labour deputy leader Lucy Powell that Andy Burnham would have been successful if he had not been blocked from standing by Sir Keir's allies.

She told the BBC's *Newscast* podcast that the Manchester mayor "probably" would have won adding that if he was the Labour candidate, "I think certainly the Greens wouldn't have gone after the seat in the same way that they did".

Ms Powell also said the party needs to "make more use of Andy Burnham".

Greens' deputy: Anti-Semitism weaponised to silence criticism

By **Sabrina Miller**
WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT

ANTI-SEMITISM is being used as a "weapon" to silence criticism of Israel, the Green Party's deputy leader has said.

Mothin Ali, 44, made the comments while throwing his weight behind the divisive "Zionism is racism" motion expected to be debated at the Green Party conference later this year.

Earlier this month *The Telegraph* revealed that grassroots members of Zack Polanski's party had submitted a proposal calling for the belief in the right to Jewish self-determination to be labelled as a "racist ideology".

Among the eight principles that will be adopted if the motion passes is support for Palestinian "resistance" against alleged "Israeli occupation", including by "armed struggle".

This could be interpreted as support for violent uprisings and terror attacks.

Green Party members can submit comments and suggestions to the motions intended for the upcoming spring conference on an internal page of the party website.

Underneath the "Zionism is racism" motion, a post seen by *The Telegraph*, appearing to be from Mr Ali, says: "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA] definition [of antisemitism] has been used as a weapon to silence criticism of Israel and Zionism. It's time we recognise Zionism for what it really is. I support this motion."

> 'This motion would open the door to a frightening witch-hunt against British Jews'

The proposed resolution also calls for the complete abolition of the state of Israel and the establishment of a "single democratic Palestinian State in all of historic Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital".

The widely adopted IHRA definition is a non-legally binding description of anti-Semitism that includes 11 examples which illustrate how anti-Jewish hatred can manifest in modern society.

These examples include drawing comparisons between contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis and uniquely denying Jewish people the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland.

In 2016 the Conservative-led Government formally adopted the IHRA definition. It was incorporated in full into the Labour Party in 2018.

Last week Mr Polanski suggested he would back the controversial motion, telling Times Radio: "If the definition of Zionism is what is happening right now by the Israeli government, then yes, absolutely, that's racist and I'll vote for it [the motion]."

A spokesman for Campaign Against Antisemitism said that an "overwhelming majority" of British Jews identify as Zionist. They added: "This motion would effectively declare them inherently racist and would open the door to a frightening witch-hunt against Jews."

A Green Party spokesman said: "This is currently not policy. It is a proposed motion," adding: "We do not yet know whether this motion will be debated at this year's spring conference."

Eat your Greens New MP Hannah Spencer celebrates winning the Gorton and Denton by-election for the Green Party – and surviving 38 hours without sleep – with a meal at a Lebanese restaurant in Levenshulme, Manchester.

Faith leaders say campaign video exposed Hindus to hate

By **Sabrina Miller**
WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT
and **Gabriella Swerling**
SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS EDITOR

THE Green Party has been accused of stirring up "anti-Hindu hatred" in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

Trupti Patel, the president of the Hindu Forum of Britain, has claimed Zack Polanski's party tried to exploit tensions in the south Asian diaspora after it circulated an Urdu language campaign video that featured a picture of Sir Keir Starmer shaking hands with Narendra Modi, India's Hindu premier.

Urdu, which is spoken by more than 100 million people, is the national language of Pakistan and an official language in India.

The Greens have been accused of distributing leaflets in Bangla and Urdu that centred on international issues such as the Israel-Gaza war and tensions between India and Pakistan.

Since British colonial rule ended in 1947, there has been constant violence and tension between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, with territorial control over Kashmir being a particular flashpoint.

Those supportive of Pakistan blame Mr Modi, a Hindu nationalist, for the violent escalation of tension. Last year, the two countries exchanged missile and drone strikes in a four-day conflict.

> 'The Greens are trying to divide Hindu and Muslim neighbours and spread hatred between them'

Critics of the Green campaign say the video was intended to drive a wedge between Muslims, especially those of Pakistani heritage, and the Labour party, at the expense of British Hindus.

Mrs Patel said the video was "abhorrent", jeopardised inter-community relations and had nothing to do with "local politics". She told *The Telegraph*: "This kind of video should not have been produced by a national party ... how can anti-Hindu hate be allowed just to appease a certain community?"

Neeraj Patel, the chairman of Hindus for Labour told *The Times of India*: "It is entirely unclear what the prime minister of India has to do with a local by-election in Greater Manchester.

"In the UK, Indian and Pakistani communities are like good neighbours and colleagues. The Greens are trying to divide Hindus and Muslims and spread hatred between communities."

The Green Party has been accused of naked sectarianism in its successful campaign to elect Hannah Spencer to the House of Commons.

On Friday, Greater Manchester Police and the Electoral Commission said they were "reviewing" allegations of so-called family voting, a practice in which two voters "confer, collude or direct each other on voting".

Responding to sectarian accusations, a Green spokesman said: "The scale of our victory shows that the Green Party has picked up substantial support in all parts of the constituency, in all areas, among all people.

"It was a victory for unity over division, for hope over hate," the spokesman added.

Grooming gang survivors want answers about targeting of white girls

By **Sabrina Miller**
WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT

THE grooming gangs inquiry must examine whether white girls were "specifically targeted" by abusers, survivors have demanded.

A letter sent to Shabana Mahmood, the Home Secretary, and Baroness Longfield, chairman of the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, is urging the Government to investigate the "role" of race, religion and ethnicity in the perpetration and "deliberate cover-up" of group-based sex crimes.

Among the letter's signatories are Chris Philp, the shadow home secretary, Fiona Goddard, a former inquiry panellist and grooming gang survivor, and Jamie Leigh Jones, another grooming gang survivor.

The letter states that there is clear evidence of "perpetrators specifically targeting victims because of their ethnicity or religion", and adds that the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the criminals and victims should be investigated as a "causal factor" of abuse.

The inquiry, announced by Sir Keir Starmer on June 14 last year, has been dogged by controversy, including the resignation of four abuse survivors.

In October 2025, survivors who had been appointed to the inquiry panel resigned, citing the Government's bad handling of the process. They said they would only consider rejoining if Jess Philips, the Labour MP and safeguarding minister, stepped down.

The Home Secretary published draft terms of reference for the inquiry in December 2025, setting out the proposed scope and focus of the investigation. But many fear that the inquiry is not going far enough. Before the finalisation of these terms at the end of March, senior politicians and grooming gang survivors have written to the Government demanding that the issue of race be placed at the heart of the review.

> 'Authorities should look into the role that race and so-called community relations played'

It comes amid concerns from senior politicians and abuse victims that the inquiry into grooming gangs will amount to a "whitewash".

Other signatories include Alicia Kearns, the shadow home office minister, and Theresa Smith, the mother of a grooming gang victim.

The letter – seen by *The Telegraph* – states: "The terms of reference direct the inquiry to consider the prevalence of certain religious, racial, and ethnic groups amongst grooming gang perpetrators, but doesn't direct the inquiry to examine the role that those characteristics played. The inquiry must look at whether the ethnic and religious background of the perpetrators and the victims was a causal factor in the abuse."

Specifically, campaigners hope the authorities will "expressly look into the role that race and so-called community relations" played in the cover-up of crimes. This includes examining the allegation that perpetrators were given shorter sentences because they were perceived to be important pillars of "their communities and their families".

Those behind the letter also believe the inquiry should be obligated to pass information to police where it "finds evidence of negligence or deliberate cover-ups".

Campaigners also say that the inquiry should look at whether grooming gangs operated in London. It follows a BBC investigation published in February, which found that girls as young as 14 were lured into forced sex by gangs working in the nation's capital.

> 'Gangs of mainly Pakistani heritage raped thousands of white working-class girls'

Signatories also want the Government to commit to publishing its findings before the next general election and to examine the possibility of "organised crime or trafficking overseas to countries like Pakistan or Albania".

Mr Philp said: "Gangs of mainly Pakistani heritage systematically raped and abused thousands of vulnerable white, working-class girls across the country for decades. This was covered up out of fear of racial tensions. Authorities were more interested in protecting rapists than young girls. We are deeply concerned that the Government's inquiry is becoming a whitewash."

The Home Office and the chairman of the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs have been contacted for comment.

News

Gangs turn derelict pubs into cannabis farms

SAVE OUR PUBS

Organised criminals take advantage of crisis in the industry by using boarded up venues to grow drugs

By **Steve Bird** *and* **Emily Driver**

DERELICT pubs are being turned into cannabis factories by organised criminals exploiting the crisis in the hospitality industry.

Drug gangs are targeting boarded-up bars because they offer the ideal conditions to set up secret, industrial-sized marijuana farms, *The Telegraph* can reveal. Analysis of police reports from across the country show how raids on former public houses are increasingly uncovering multi-million-pound marijuana factories.

The shift to using empty pubs to hide vast cannabis crops is being masterminded by organised criminal gangs with links to people-smuggling networks. Recent court cases have shown how some small-boat migrants are being forced to pay off their English Channel crossing fare by working in cannabis farms set up in disused pubs.

Numerous boarded-up pubs have been commandeered by gangs who have converted the beer cellars and bars into factories, and upstairs rooms into accommodation for migrants working as "farmers". Because pubs are usually large, they can house rigs of heating, air conditioning and lighting systems which maximise the potency of huge crops made up of hundreds of plants.

As commercial properties, empty pubs are usually professionally boarded up with thick steel screens over windows and doors, which means less light and heat leak from the building, reducing the likelihood of detection. The devastating financial conditions engulfing the pub industry also mean buildings are often left vacant for years, allowing gangs to produce numerous harvests before being eventually discovered.

Beer cellars are also ideal for creating humid atmospheres required to cultivate cannabis seedlings and saplings.

The Telegraph has been campaigning to save Britain's pubs, which are facing a rise in business rates, cuts to Covid-era relief and increases in National Insurance and the minimum wage. Shortly after the campaign was launched, a support package was announced by Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, to provide them with temporary relief from planned higher taxes, yet pubs are still closing.

AVON AND SOMERSET POLICE

The fact that pub closures are fuelling drug production is an alarming twist. *The Telegraph* has found scores of examples where police raids have uncovered sophisticated drug farms over the last two years.

In the village of Tickenham, Somerset, a drugs gang moved into The Star Inn after its owners shut its doors in 2023 following "overwhelming financial demands ... coupled with the relentless financial strain on the industry". In August 2025, police seized 500 cannabis plants and arrested four men.

In January this year, police raided a derelict pub in Northolt, West London, that contained 300 cannabis plants. The White Hart, a Grade II-listed building, had remained closed since 2015.

When officers raided the apparently empty Taffy's bar in Merthyr Tydfil in November last year, they found 1,500 marijuana plants as well as two Albanians – Guri Bajrami, 29, and Kledi Hysa, 31 – living in the attic. The pair pleaded guilty to producing cannabis, and were each jailed for one year and six months this February.

In 2025, a boarded-up pub in Oldham, Greater Manchester, was found to have been used to cultivate £1m of cannabis plants. Then, 400 cannabis plants as well as living quarters for "farmers" were discovered in the Old Green Bear in Nuneaton. The pub had closed in 2022.

Last August, two years after The Star Inn in Somerset closed, police seized 500 cannabis plants in a raid conducted by Chief Inspector Jonathan Murray, left

In the last five years, The Bricklayers Arms in Uckfield, East Sussex, has been raided twice, unearthing a cannabis factory each time. The extent of the problem was outlined in a court case in summer last year after the National Crime Agency smashed two gangs running drug farms from abandoned hospitality venues across the Midlands, London and the North of England.

The Vietnamese and Afghan gangs took over derelict pubs, nightclubs and hotels where they used migrants, held in "debt bondage" for Channel crossings, as live-in farmers.

When officers raided the network's Queen's Head pub in Hockley, Birmingham, they arrested six Albanian nationals running more than 300 plants in grow tents beneath huge lighting rigs. The fire threat such farms pose was illustrated starkly in June 2025 when a section of Norwich was evacuated after the derelict Cat and Fiddle caught fire because of faulty wiring for hydroponic equipment for 40 marijuana plants.

A raid on a boarded-up pub in the centre of Weston-super-Mare revealed how electricity supply meters had been bypassed using makeshift and dangerous wiring to rig up banks of plugs, cabling and electricity converters to power lights, fans and air conditioning. The factory was estimated to contain £1m of cannabis and deemed a serious fire hazard.

Engineers from local electricity companies and fire brigades usually accompany police on raids to suspected drug farms because the power supplies are tampered with.

Chief Constable Jason Hogg, the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for drugs, said: "Derelict commercial premises, such as shops and pubs, can be an easy target for criminals. While they are in plain sight, they are often boarded up and serve no purpose to the public, who stop taking notice of them."

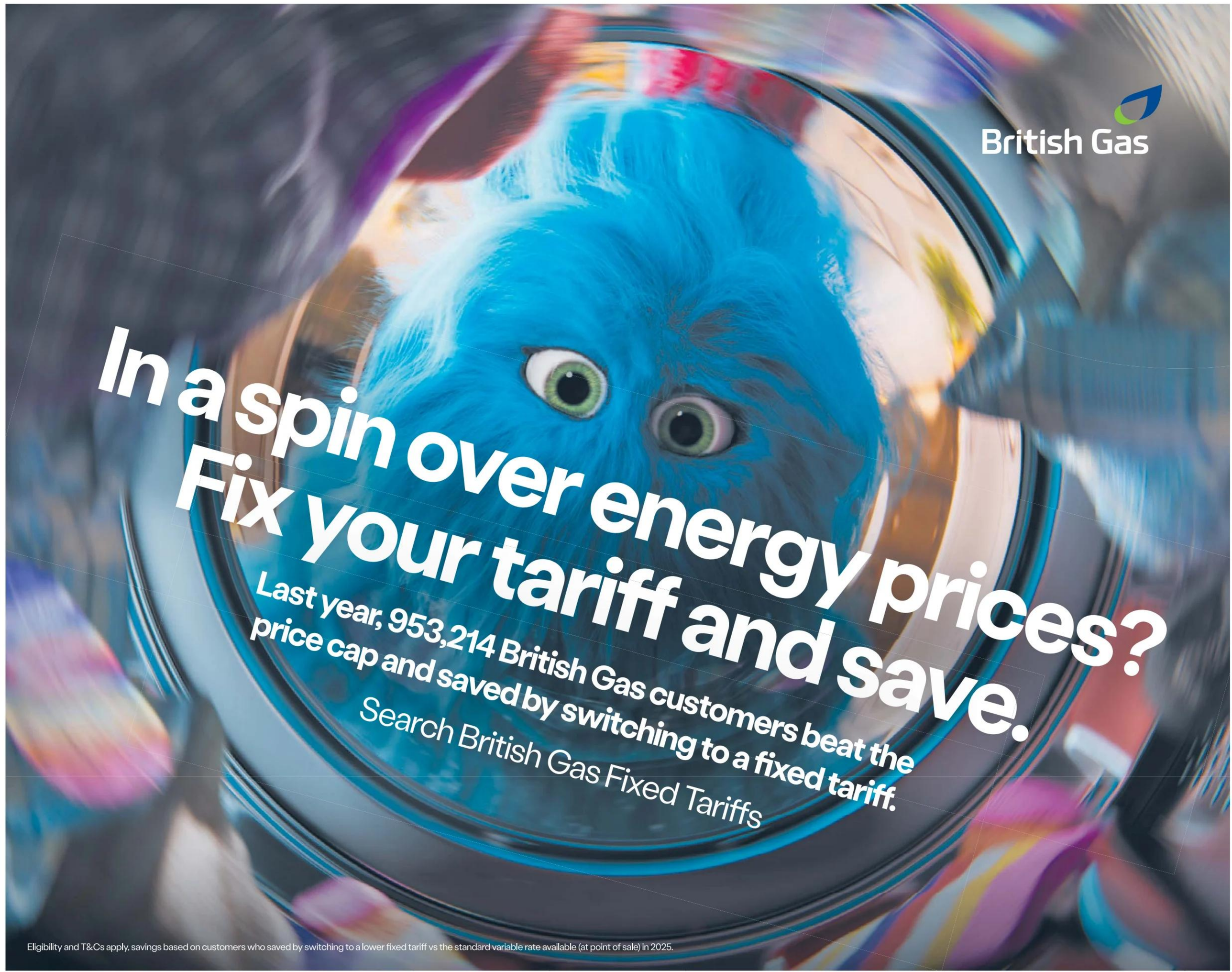
> 'Cannabis farms operating out of disused pubs can create unpredictable and hazardous conditions'

He added that such farms are "increasingly linked to organised crime groups, who ... exploit vulnerable people and put local communities at risk with their crudely established cannabis factories".

A spokesman for the National Fire Chiefs Council said: "Cannabis farms operating out of disused pubs can create conditions that are unpredictable and hazardous, largely because the materials, processes, and structural changes to the buildings involved are often hidden, unregulated, and unsafe."

Jamie Reeve, of the Energy Networks Association which represents the UK's electricity network operators, said: "People who use unauthorised, illegal connections to steal electricity are putting themselves and others at risk of serious injury or death as even low voltage lines can kill if handled improperly."

Mr Hogg urged the public to be vigilant for possible cannabis farms. Signs include curtains and windows being permanently closed, unusual comings and goings, light emitting from the roof space or leaking from odd places, a constant hum from fans or air conditioning units, rubbish bags being dumped that are full of garden waste or containing fertiliser bags, and condensation on windows.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Poet 'cancelled' for supporting JK Rowling

Rape victim in court battle after magazine dropped her over social media links to Harry Potter writer

By **Steve Bird**

A POET was "cancelled" by a taxpayer-funded arts magazine because she held "problematic" gender-critical views, legal papers say.

Abigail Ottley claimed her poetry was "censored" by an Arts Council England-funded publication because she believes biological sex is immutable and entirely separate to "gender identity".

The poet, in her 70s and from Penzance, Cornwall, is launching a High Court battle which could force publicly funded arts groups to protect artistic freedom and promote impartiality.

Ms Ottley, who describes herself as a trauma survivor who holds "sex realist" views, has filed legal papers accusing the Arts Council of failing to investigate properly her complaint against *The Aftershock Review*, a poetry magazine which promotes writing "shaped by survival, identity and lived experience".

The legal papers added that as well as being a rape victim, Ms Ottley endured an abusive marriage with a "cross-dresser who sought to pass as a woman" which encouraged her to hold "gender-critical views... [and] the need for women to have safe and single sex spaces."

She said the magazine initially accepted one of her poems for publication but then "cancelled" it because they scoured her "problematic" social media posts and found she supported gender-critical views, including those expressed by the Harry Potter author, JK Rowling.

Abigail Ottley says Arts Council would not print her poem because of her political views

Ms Ottley, who was groomed, raped and shot in the eye as a teenager, "gladly" contributed to a successful 2025 crowdfunding campaign set up to launch Aftershock. Arts Council England also made a £32,300 National Lottery Project Grant to support the organisation.

She then submitted a poem which was selected for publication in October. But nearly two weeks later she received an email from Aftershock informing her that her poem had been withdrawn amid "concerns" about her use of social media.

She used social media to support high profile campaigners, such as JK Rowling and Baroness Sharron Davies, the former Olympic swimmer, to campaign for women's rights and single-sex spaces and sports.

Ms Ottley explained: "On social media I have simply re-tweeted messages from gender-critical people whom I support, who believe that a man is a man and a woman is a woman."

The email from Aftershock added: "Following an internal review, and in light of concerns raised about your social media presence, we've decided not to proceed with publishing your work in this issue.

"As a trauma-informed and inclusive publication, *The Aftershock Review* has a duty of care to ensure our contributors and readers feel safe and respected. This decision reflects our commitment to those principles and is final."

Ms Ottley contacted Freedom in the Arts, a network of artists, producers and academics who campaign for freedom of expression, which then lodged a complaint with Arts Council England.

The group claimed that because Aftershock had received National Lottery funding it was bound by equality law which required it not to be discriminatory.

> 'As a trauma-informed, inclusive publication, we have decided against publishing your work'

Its complaint added how there was a "serious concern" the decision to withdraw the poet's work was based on her "protected belief" under the Equality Act that sex is immutable.

The pre-action letter says: "While Ms Ottley has used her social media accounts to re-tweet posts by high profile campaigners for women's rights and single-sex spaces, which she considers are invaluable for women's safety privacy and dignity, including for example JK Rowling, this is not and cannot be a lawful reason to refuse to publish Ms Ottley's poetry."

In January, the Arts Council dismissed her complaint, insisting they had not found a breach of their funding conditions.

The very same day, the Arts Council awarded Aftershock a further £60,000 funding.

An Arts Council spokesman said: "We will not comment further at this stage, as legal proceedings are ongoing."

Quentin Crisp was transgender, activists claim

By **Daniel Martin**
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

THE British gay icon Quentin Crisp was transgender, activists have claimed.

Pro-trans campaigners appear to have edited the author and raconteur's entry on the website Wikipedia to describe him as a "she" throughout.

It has sparked a row with gender-critical gay rights activists, who have lambasted the online encyclopaedia for allowing history to be "rewritten".

In a 1977 interview, Crisp, who lived his life as an effeminate gay man, said sex was immutable and that he was not a woman, even though he wished he had been one.

However, just before he died at the age of 90, he said he was a "woman trapped in a man's body" and accepted he was transgender. He said he knew he was not "physically a woman" and did not ask to be referred to as "she".

Crisp was a familiar figure in British life after writing his 1968 autobiography, *The Naked Civil Servant*, which ITV later adapted into a film starring John Hurt. Crisp died in 1999.

The so-called "transing" of figures has in the past seen national symbols such as Joan of Arc and the Roman emperor Elagabalus retrospectively "claimed" as trans.

Kate Barker, the chief executive of the gender-critical LGB Alliance, said there was no reason to change Crisp's pronouns as he had never asked to be referred to as "she" in his lifetime.

"Transing the dead reveals the homophobia at the core of gender identity ideology," she said. "Activists choose targets who were gay or lesbian, or who didn't conform to sex stereotypes, like Joan of Arc and the British Army surgeon Margaret Ann Bulkley.

"Quentin Crisp regretted he wasn't a woman but knew he was a man; it's all there in his autobiography. Wikipedia may be happy to rewrite history, but by robbing a dead gay man of his identity they show they can't be trusted to be impartial on anything regarding sex or sexuality."

Wikipedia was approached for comment.

PHIL WILKINSON / SNIB

Young riders
Issy and Freddie Innes mount up for the final meet of the season of the Buccleuch Hunt at Bowhill in the Scottish Borders.

Parents head to court over BBC 'trans bias'

By **Patrick Sawer**

HUNDREDS of parents are set to go to court over the BBC's "constant drip-feed of one-sided pro-trans programmes".

They have warned they will seek a judicial review to force the broadcasting regulator to investigate what they claim is the BBC's pro-trans bias damaging their children's health.

The Bayswater Support Group (BSG), which represents more than 800 parents of children and teenagers who believe they are transgender, has told Ofcom it will take legal action in the High Court unless it reverses its decision not to investigate their complaints about the BBC's trans coverage. The parents claim the broadcaster is promoting trans lifestyles to young people who are already vulnerable because of their age and mental health needs.

At times, the BBC has appeared to encourage children to undertake irreversible medical transition, the parents claim. *The Telegraph* revealed in November that among the complaints is that senior BBC managers dismissed concerns and failed to take them seriously.

The group had urged the regulator to examine what it described as the BBC's "failure to uphold their duty of impartiality and safeguarding", as a result of a "constant drip-feed of one-sided stories... celebrating the trans experience".

Ofcom responded that its role "is not to investigate the BBC's editorial approach or its editorial policy towards any particular issue, but to . . . consider complaints about specific programmes or articles", and that its powers cannot be applied to service-wide breaches of the Broadcasting Code.

But the BSG maintains that the regulator has a duty to investigate the BBC's "biased approach", as part of its duty to "have regard to the vulnerability of children and others whose circumstances . . . put them in need of special protection".

A spokesman for BSG said: "It's clear the BBC has been captured by gender ideology and it's Ofcom's role to do something about this."

A BBC spokesman said: "Our intention is to give clear, accurate and duly impartial information to audiences and to reflect the different viewpoints on the issue." An Ofcom spokesman said: "We confirm we have received this letter and will reply in due course."

Woke schemes 'a waste of £10bn tax cash'

By **Sarah Knapton** SCIENCE EDITOR

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is wasting taxpayers' money on "woke pseudoscience" and should be abolished, say campaigners.

A new report from the TaxPayers' Alliance claims that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) – through its associated funding councils – is spending millions of pounds on research that is "detached from the priorities of the British people".

It said ministers should be prepared to "abolish the AHRC" to ensure that taxpayers' money is "spent efficiently and accountably".

Recent research grants include nearly £840,000 awarded to Durham University for a project titled Black, Mad and Disabled, which aims to investigate how black, disabled and mentally unwell students are being discriminated against at Britain's universities.

Sheffield University also received funding to explore the impact of LGBT choirs on the mental health of trans people, while cash was allocated to Brighton University to look into the effects of homophobia in 80s-90s Brighton – one of Britain's most progressive cities.

The University of Nottingham was awarded AHRC funding to look at how the prevalence of the English language in online trans communities can be bad for trans people who cannot, or do not want to, speak English.

Shimeon Lee, a policy analyst at the TaxPayers' Alliance and author of the new report said: "UKRI is spending close to £10bn a year of taxpayers' money, yet too much of this funding is detached from the priorities of the British people and insulated from meaningful democratic scrutiny. Ministers should be prepared to abolish the AHRC, merge other research councils, and refocus public research funding on areas with clear national benefit,."

UKRI has an operating expenditure of £9.9bn in 2024-2025, an increase of £516m from the previous year. It employs more than 9,000 staff.

A UKRI spokesman said: "Our investments deliver value on major issues such as public health, mitigating climate change impacts, informing public policy on AI, youth ketamine addiction, modern slavery, and knife crime."

'The man who could do it all': Pop legend Neil Sedaka, writer of hundreds of hits, dies at 86

By **Patrick Sawer**
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

NEIL SEDAKA, the music legend responsible for some of the world's most recognisable songs, has died at the age of 86.

With hits like *Breaking Up Is Hard to Do, Oh Carol* and *Calendar Girl*, Sedaka established himself as both one of rock 'n' roll's biggest stars and a major songwriter for others. He wrote or co-wrote more than 500 songs, many of them hits. Sedaka died suddenly, with no other details of his death being released.

His family said in a statement: "Our family is devastated by the sudden passing of our beloved husband, father and grandfather, Neil Sedaka.

"A true rock 'n' roll legend, an inspiration to millions, but most importantly, at least to those of us who were lucky enough to know him, an incredible human being who will be deeply missed." Sedaka, a Juilliard-trained, Brooklyn-born son of a Jewish taxi driver who began performing as a teenager, was a key member of the Brill Building songwriting factory.

He teamed up with boyhood neighbour Howard Greenfield to write a string of songs reflecting the teenage innocence of the post-Elvis, pre-Beatles era of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including *Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen*, *Calendar Girl and Oh! Carol*, a lament for his high school sweetheart, Carole King. He then re-emerged after a lengthy lull with songs such as *Laughter in the Rain* and *Bad Blood*.

Fellow stars paid tribute to Sedaka. Carole King said on her Facebook page: "Neil Sedaka was so talented, and he inspired me to follow my dream of being a songwriter. With love and gratitude and condolences to his family."

Micky Dolenz of the Monkees said on Instagram that Sedaka was "one of those rare songwriters who could do it all".

A skilled pianist, he was nominated for five Grammy awards, and provided hits for other artists, including S*tupid Cupid*, which gave Connie Francis her first, belated, success in 1959, and The Captain & Tennille's cover of his *Love Will Keep Us Together*, which topped the charts in 1975.

Sedaka was also a major influence on Elton John, briefly signing to his Rocket label in the 1970s, and collaborated with Abba in 1973 to write the English lyrics for their hit *Ring Ring*.

Sedaka played dozens of concerts a year well into his 80s, managing to hold on to the enthusiasm and broad vocal range of his youth while other stars of his generation faded away.

Explaining his longevity he told the Associated Press in 2012: "Past 70, Pavarotti told me the vocal cords are not what they used to be. I'm very fortunate that my voice has held. It's nice to be a legend, but it's better to be a working legend." He said of his fame: "You do have to give up your privacy. But the good thing is that you can get a table in a restaurant or a seat at the theatre."

The prolific Neil Sedaka in 1977, performing on stage in London

Sedaka grew up in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach neighbourhood, sharing a two-bedroom apartment with 11 relatives where he now has a street named in his honour, Neil Sedaka Way.

Unpopular as a child by his own admission, his talent was recognised by a second-grade teacher who urged his mother, Eleanor, to buy him a piano. She went to work in a department store to pay for a secondhand upright and managed his career for years, before his wife, Leba, took over the role.

"Music is so much a part of me: my parents told me that when I was an infant, I wouldn't eat unless the radio was playing music," he told *the Guardian* in 2012. Sedaka had initially studied to be a concert pianist, realising his talent for singing and writing pop music when, at 13, he began writing songs with 16-year-old Greenfield. Their partnership would last more than a decade.

Taking part in a musical contest in 1955, 16-year-old Sedaka was chosen by Arthur Rubenstein as the city's best high school piano student and performed on a classical radio station as a prize.

That same year he discovered rock 'n' roll, performing a song, "Mr. Moon," he had written with Greenfield, his classmate at Abraham Lincoln High School.

"I sang it in the auditorium for a ballyhoo show and I remember there was a bit of a riot. The kids were jumping and screaming," Sedaka said.

"After that I was able to go into the sweet shop with the tough kids with the leather jackets."

Of his time writing what became some of the hallmark romantic ballads of rock 'n' roll, Sedaka once joked: "When we ran out of lyrics we'd use a doo-bee-doo."

Sedaka and his wife Leba, who he married in 1962, had two children.`

Epstein used Ferguson's debts to gain royal access

Emails show paedophile financier manipulated 'broken' duchess to enter former prince's inner circle

By **Janet Eastham**
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

ON STAGE at the United Nations headquarters in New York in March 2010, Sarah Ferguson, then Duchess of York, unveiled her plans for an online "mothers' army" to link women in need with those able to help.

"I will be the general uniting mothers all over the world, wherever they are, so they can come and be listened to," Ms Ferguson told reporters, explaining the charity would connect women facing rape, abuse and poverty to support services.

She claimed the idea was inspired by British women in the Second World War who distributed sugar and butter from village halls. However, emails disclosed by the US justice department (DoJ) last month show the "Mothers' Army" brand, incorporated a year later, was first suggested by Jeffrey Epstein.

"[Y]ou should run a compny [sic].. suggestion start Mothers army," Epstein wrote to Ms Ferguson on April 6 2009, while serving a prison sentence for soliciting a minor for prostitution. "You can form it as a public vehicle but with military terms ... chairman – general, board of directors – joint chiefs."

If she thought it at all inappropriate for a convicted paedophile to propose a philanthropic venture built around "integrity, consciousness" and "morals", she did not show it. "My dear spectacular and special friend Jeffrey," she replied four days later. "You are a legend, and I am so proud of you."

A review of the emails between the pair released by the DoJ reveal a previously unknown level of contact. Ms Ferguson appears to have met the convicted paedophile at least six times between April 2009 and December 2010, including twice while he was on day release from jail.

The emails show how vulnerable Ms Ferguson was in April 2009, both financially and emotionally, when she met the convict for a "quick cup of tea" at his Palm Beach office. Around this time the disgraced duchess wrote that she felt "broken" and had "lost my way completely". However, with flattery, gifts and the promise of a business venture to ease her debts, Epstein quickly won her over.

On April 17 he sent more ideas for the Mothers' Army, urging a multi-level marketing model. On June 14 he told her to recruit "five powerful women who will not get jealous of your success". He suggested a "mother pin" and "pink berets". Promotional material should echo the US Army slogan "be all you can be". After each typo-ridden directive, Ms Ferguson appeared energised. "Has anyone told you, you are a genius," she replied. Yet her emails also reveal a growing dependence. Even routine steps were left to Epstein.

It was as an adviser on her debts and the proposed Mothers' Army that Epstein introduced David Stern to Ms Ferguson in 2009. By then her debts exceeded £5m. In February 2010, Ms Ferguson introduced Mr Stern to her former husband, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, describing him as a trusted adviser rated "highly" by Epstein.

> 'It was sooooo crystal clear to me you were only really friends with me to get to Andrew. That really hurt'

The introduction proved pivotal. In the months that followed, as she faced legal action from creditors and the fallout from a *News of the World* cash-for-access sting, she turned to Epstein, writing "I am drowning" and describing "feeling very traumatised and alone".

By then, Epstein had his man, Mr Stern, inside her ex-husband's circle and his focus shifted. He broke from Ms Ferguson and abandoned plans to set up a business with her in April 2011, after she had apologised for letting him pay her debts and told the *Evening Standard* "I abhor paedophilia".

In September 2011 she emailed Epstein: "It was sooooo crystal clear to me that you were only friends with me to get to Andrew ... and that really hurt me deeply. More than you will know."

While Ms Ferguson did become a director of a UK company called Mothers' Army, it never traded and was dissolved in December 2016. Ms Ferguson declined to comment.

REUTERS/ALESSANDRO GAROFALO

Over the top Madonna, 67, is leaving nothing to chance as she is flanked by towering security personnel on arriving at the Dolce & Gabbana show in Milan.

Cash-strapped councils sit on £9bn windfall from builders

By **Janet Eastham**

COUNCILS are hoarding more than £9billion earmarked for schools, bus services and affordable housing, *The Telegraph* can reveal.

The Home Builders Federation (HBF) has identified that a record sum of developer cash is lying unused in local authority accounts.

To secure planning permission, building companies must make payments to offset the impact of new housing projects. But a survey by the trade body found that around £9billion of such funds – up £800million on last year – is being hoarded by councils rather than being spent on public transport and other local amenities.

A third of the money – £3billion – has been held for more than five years, despite many agreements requiring funds to be used within that timeframe.

Neil Jefferson, chief executive of the HBF, called the findings "a damning indictment on the ability of local councils to deliver to their communities".

He called on ministers to take "urgent action" to "ensure this money is spent promptly" and warned that failure to do so could jeopardise Labour's commitment to building 1.5 million new homes.

> £3bn
>
> **The amount of developer's cash left in council accounts for more than five years, despite agreements to spend it**

The unspent pot includes £2billion allocated for schools and £700 million for affordable housing; the HBF estimates this funding could deliver around 8,500 affordable homes and 112,000 school places. A further £320 million is earmarked for new healthcare facilities.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets alone holds over £260million in unspent developer contributions – nine times the national average. Five other councils – Wandsworth, Brent, Wokingham, Kensington and Chelsea and Suffolk – also hold over £1,000 per household in unspent contributions.

Mr Jefferson said the findings "should be a major cause of concern for local communities and for ministers."

While he praised the Government for committing to spend £5.8 million on local services earlier this month, he said it was "clearly an option" to use up the £9billion in council coffers first.

A spokesman for Tower Hamlets council stressed that the borough was one of the fastest-growing in the country, and "consistently delivers some of the highest levels of new housing in the country, which in turn generates developer contributions on a scale far greater than most local planning authorities".

Labour donor accused of 'mass evictions' before rental law changes

By **Camilla Turner**
SUNDAY POLITICAL EDITOR

A BILLIONAIRE Labour donor has come under fire after the company he founded staged alleged "mass evictions" ahead of a government clampdown on landlords.

Asif Aziz has been accused of a "cynical" attempt to force out renters before new laws come into force that will ban so-called "no-fault evictions" after his real estate firm served notice against tenants at a London block.

Mr Aziz – the founder of Criterion Capital, which owns the Trocadero building in Leicester Square and has a £9bn property portfolio across the UK and Europe – has previously donated £50,000 to the Labour Party through his company.

The Aziz Foundation, his family's charity, also makes thousands of pounds worth of donations to MPs.

But eviction notices served by Criterion Capital to tenants at Britannia Point in Colliers Wood, south-west London, has prompted a backlash from Sir Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London. Sir Sadiq said he was "appalled" at reports of alleged mass evictions of tenants in residential blocks owned by the company. The company denies the claims.

Tom Copley, the mayor's deputy for housing, has written to Mr Aziz to demand clarification and urge him to "urgently reconsider".

"To evict tenants shortly before the implementation of the [Renters' Rights] Act would be a short-sighted and cynical attempt to bypass the rules and show a disrespect for the very spirit of this much-needed legislation," Mr Copley said.

Labour plans to ban "no-fault" evictions have been blamed for causing a spate of landlords ordering tenants to move out before the Government's flagship Act – which will come into force on May 1 – makes it harder to remove unwanted renters.

Under the current regime, Section 21 notices allow landlords to force renters out during their tenancy without needing a specified reason. Last year, Rushanara Ali, the Government's homelessness minister, was forced to resign after it was revealed she evicted tenants at her London property before increasing the rent.

Billionaire Asif Aziz's company is facing criticism

Dame Siobhain McDonagh, the Labour MP for Mitcham and Morden, said she was "extremely concerned" about the number of Britannia Point residents who "may now face homelessness", saying in a letter to the current chief executive of Criterion Capital that she was "alarmed at the number of tenants who reported receiving eviction notices".

Mr Aziz has long been involved in philanthropic causes, having previously been appointed as a board member of Mosaic, a leadership programme for Muslims, set up by the King in 2007. In 2015, he set up the Aziz Foundation which funds a number of projects and initiatives, including paying for interns to work in the offices of MPs which has included the Labour MPs Naz Shah, Afzal Khan and Chi Onwurah.

Criterion Capital has previously made donations to political parties. In 2016, it donated £50,000 to Labour. The company also donated £5,000 to the Conservative Party the following year.

A spokesman for the Mayor of London said: "The mayor is appalled at reports Criterion Capital are mass evicting Londoners from their homes. We have written to them and asked them to urgently explain their actions.

"It is unacceptable to force Londoners out of their homes for no good reason – it leaves residents in an awful position, scared about the future for themselves and their family.

"Sadiq has always been clear that every Londoner deserves the security and dignity of a stable home. However, unfortunately, we know that the biggest cause of homelessness is a Section 21 'no-fault' eviction. "

A spokesman for Criterion Capital said that a "routine and lawful tenancy matter" had been "misrepresented and politicised", adding: "This matter is a commercial issue between private contracting parties. A limited number of statutory notices were lawfully served, in full compliance with the Housing Act 2004, in respect of periodic tenancies held by private tenants paying market rents. This formed part of a standard asset management process to regularise occupation terms,.

> 'The mayor is appalled by reports... it is not acceptable to force Londoners out of their homes'

"There has been no policy to clear Britannia Point and no attempt to accelerate action ahead of legislative reform. Only a small proportion of tenants at that building have been served notice, and no fixed-term tenancy has been terminated prematurely. The overwhelming majority of residents remain unaffected."

The spokesman added that there had been no "mass evictions", adding: "The routine conclusion of a private-sector periodic tenancy, in accordance with statutory notice provisions, is not synonymous with homelessness. These are market-rent tenancies and residents retain access to alternative accommodation within the private rental sector."

Personal

Text for the day

HE THAT covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.
Proverbs 17.9 (AV)

Birthdays

JAMES SMITH IS 50! Happy Birthday to a fabulous husband and father. All our love from Sarah and Jake xx
Online Ref: W0046498

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It's a big no from us, locals tell Dragons' Den Theo over mural

By **Telegraph Reporter**

DRAGONS' DEN star Theo Paphitis is at the centre of a row over the expansion of a mural that residents say is ruining their peace.

The art was first painted on the side of Paphitis' business, the London Graphic Centre, in Covent Garden in 2021, but the company is now petitioning to create a new design.

Those living nearby claim the mural has been "distressing" as tourists "frequently gather directly outside residents' windows, stopping to pose, photograph and film".

The new plans would see a restored 14.4 x 15m geometric mural, created by artist Rupert Lowe, in place by 2030.

One joint objection from locals, seen by *The Telegraph*, reads: "The murals in this highly visible location attract members of the public who visit specifically to take photographs and social media content, including for Instagram.

"Visitors frequently gather directly outside residents' windows, stopping to pose, photograph and film."

It said that for the past five years, tourists regularly cause a "loss of privacy ... leaving tenants feeling exposed inside their own homes".

In planning documents, planning agents for the Mercers' Company, which has an extensive property portfolio in Covent Garden, said the artwork "enhances a functional but neglected space".

Westminster city council previously rejected plans for the first mural in 2020 after planning officers concluded it was "an affront to the senses", but it was later allowed.

Lowe, who created the original mural, said in 2021: "If we are not allowed to make mistakes, we cannot be truly creative."

Theo Paphitis's London Graphic Centre wants to expand the mural, despite complaints about the current artwork

Michael Want, Chief Operating Officer, London Graphic Centre, said the mural was "appreciated by many visitors to Covent Garden, which is naturally a busy part of London".

He said that the mural was fading due to weathering, and the recommissioned design would allow Lowe to create a mural that "remains sensitive to its surroundings while maintaining the positive impact the artwork has had on the public realm."

Mr Want claimed that the addition of the mural stopped the area being "misused" as it was frequently plagued with "litter...and dog waste".

The Mercers' Company said: "We have applied to renew consent for the existing mural, in order to refresh its appearance, essentially on a like-for-like basis, which is supported by our long-standing occupier, the London Graphic Centre."

Westminster city council has been approached for comment.

The existing mural on the London Graphic Centre, which Covent Garden residents say is "distressing"

Kim's young gun sets sights on leadership

By **Kelly-Anne Taylor**

NORTH KOREA has released an unprecedented photo of Kim Jong-un's daughter firing a rifle.

Kim Ju-ae, thought to be just 13, can be seen looking through a viewfinder, aiming and firing the gun, while wearing a leather jacket.

Released by the state-run Korean Central News Agency, the photo is unusual as Kim Ju-ae is alone in the photo. It fuels speculation that Kim has chosen his daughter as his successor.

The photo was taken at the Party Central Committee headquarters where Kim met with leading cadres and military commanding officers to give each of them a "new-generation" sniper rifle.

Kim Ju-ae, daughter of the North Korean dictator, fires a sniper's rifle at army ceremony

Kim said he personally prepared the "special presents" to commend those in attendance for their commitment to their country.

She said it was "really a wonderful weapon", adding: "These presents represent my appraisal of your extraordinary devotion for the country and the people and an expression of my absolute trust in you."

It was the latest in a long line of public appearances by Kim Ju-ae, who has steadily attended more events alongside her father.

MANDOGA MEDIA / AVALON

It's a bug's life
Performers dangle from the tentacles of a giant mechanical insect at the Menton Lemon Festival in the south of France. It was part of the Marvels of Life night parade during the 15-day event, attended by 200,000 people.

Putin takes control of Russian internet

Moscow can now dictate what people see, say or share online and turn off citizens at flick of a switch

By **David Averre**

VLADIMIR PUTIN has taken inspiration from China by handing the Kremlin total control over the internet.

Under new laws, Moscow can now dictate what its 146 million citizens can see, say and share online and, if deemed necessary, disconnect Russians from the internet with a flick of a switch.

From today, Roskomnadzor, Russia's state media regulator, will have much greater power, becoming the "central manager" of the country's online networks. It can now throttle traffic, block content or deploy a nationwide internet blackout at a moment's notice.

Moscow is degrading private messaging services such as WhatsApp and Telegram as it pushes users onto the Max app, a state-backed platform. It cements years of creeping digital repression and aims to eliminate any challenge to the stability of Putin's regime as the war in Ukraine drags into its fifth year amid murmurings of discontent within Russia over the stagnating economy and the lack of progress on the frontlines.

Western officials say Russia is losing more troops than it can recruit for the first time since it invaded, with Putin's forces suffering almost 40,000 casualties a month since November while recruiting 35,000 soldiers.

Experts told *The Telegraph* that Moscow is seeking to create a China-style system where the state controls the internet to prevent any criticism of the Russian state or the Kremlin's narrative about the war. They described the multi-pronged approach as "social engineering on a massive scale" that effectively updates the Stalinist surveillance state for the digital age.

As the central manager, Kremlin-controlled Roskomnadzor is now responsible for defending Russia from online "threats to security, stability and integrity".

Andrei Soldatov, a Russian security services expert, said Roskomnadzor's pervasive powers are born from Putin's "paranoia" that the political upheaval that Russia experienced in the 20th century could repeat itself.

He said the biggest threat isn't a vocal dissident such as Alexei Navalny, who was assassinated by Russia with poison from an Ecuadorian frog, but a mass uprising and mutinywithin the Kremlin.

"The biggest threat is not a crisis, like the [Wagner Group] mutiny led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, or a large-scale Ukrainian attack on Russian soil," Mr Soldatov said. "Suddenly, people who were previously not engaged in any kind of politics could start posting or sharing information about this, and it could spread like wildfire.

Vladimir Putin has overseen years of creeping digital repression in Russia

"Controlling the message is not enough – the Kremlin needs a system to control the traffic, isolate anything dangerous and turn it off. That's exactly what they've built."

Similar tactics were seen recently in Iran. As people took to the streets amid a deepening economic crisis, the regime in Tehran cut off the internet to prevent citizens from sharing videos and other calls to action.

The security forces then led a brutal crackdown that left thousands dead, quelling the unrest.

Roskomnadzor has already been flexing its muscles. In May 2025, Russian citizens began reporting mobile internet shutdowns, and by mid-June, more than half of the regions in Russia had been affected.

That trend has only worsened. Data collected by Na Svyazi, an independent monitoring group, found that, on average, regions suffered mobile network blackouts on nearly four out of every five days in the month of January.

In some cases, even essential "whitelisted" sites, such as government webpages and online banking, were inaccessible during the blackouts.

Other recently adopted laws strive to ensure ordinary Russians don't go looking for content the Kremlin does not want them to find.

In December, a court in the Sverdlovsk region fined a man who allegedly searched for details of the Russian Volunteer Corps – a Russian armed group fighting for Ukraine – while on a bus.

The FSB security services intercepted his search history and arrested him the same day for trying to access "extremist" content in the first legal case of its kind.

> 'They are trying to re-engineer how people behave. They are successful. People are afraid'

Eva [not her real name], who lives in Russia's Krasnodar region, told *The Telegraph* that the crackdowns echo Soviet-era repression, which drove people to self-censor and turn in their neighbours.

"I have friends who had their phones confiscated and checked by the security services. They can check who you follow, what you post and who you message.

"I only have private social media profiles and always use a VPN. But it's still dangerous to post or share some things.

"Unfortunately, there are those who report people to the authorities."

Soldatov, a journalist who fled Russia in 2020 and was subsequently designated a "foreign agent", understands the pressure better than most.

"They're trying to re-engineer how people behave. I would say they're quite successful. People are afraid."

As a state-backed app, Max represents yet another tool in the Kremlin's arsenal. Now pre-installed on all Russian mobile devices, computers and even smart TVs, it enjoyed a massive marketing push last year.

Private businesses and public organisations such as universities and housing groups have been instructed to migrate their group chats and administrative threads from Telegram and WhatsApp to Max.

Individual users, meanwhile, are expected to make a Digital ID, linking their Max profile to their passport, national insurance number and tax identity to access government services and authenticate online activity.

"They want to have full access to the data of their citizens," Dr Olga Solovyeva, a tech governance researcher, said.

"It's getting much closer to the Chinese version of the internet – forcing people onto domestic platforms and gaining control over the infrastructure. That's how you decide how information is disseminated, and how people behave."

Dr Soldatov added: "The government is telling you, 'If you want to use our services, you need to go to Max'. Your logins cannot be authorised if you are using WhatsApp, for instance. That's an effective way of forcing you to move, because it makes you reliant on the state ecosystem."

The Ukraine children condemned to live in constant state of fear

By **Gordon Cole-Schmidt**

IN the Shevchenko family home, a grim nighttime routine has emerged. The whirr of the air-raid siren sends the youngest of the nine foster children to their adopted parents' bedroom. Alina, 3, hides under the blanket. Ivan, 2, sobs. Anatoly, 10, sits alone.

Mishka, 16, checks the online chat groups to see whether it's Shahed attack drones, ballistic missiles or artillery attacks flying overhead. Vika, 18, reads fairytales to the children who can't sleep. Sometimes, her voice falters when her thoughts drift to her older brother, who was sent to the front line last year. He's been missing for seven months.

Artem, 11, Zhenya, 10 and Maria, 7, find it particularly difficult to talk because of the trauma from four years of war in Ukraine. After the siblings were abandoned at the start of the war, cockroaches burrowed into their ears and died there. They had lost most of their hearing by the time a doctor at a hospital in the central Ukrainian city of Kropyvnytskyi discovered the cause. He hadn't seen a case like it in more than 30 years.

But the damage to the crucial feedback loop that helps children learn to speak was done. So after the long sleepless nights, the three stay largely silent.

The Telegraph spoke with 51 children in three regions across Ukraine about the physical and psychological trauma they've faced since Vladimir Putin launched his invasion four years ago.

Over the last five weeks, we have heard stories of children self-harming, having night terrors, bedwetting, panic attacks, violent bullying, emotional outbursts and complete withdrawal from communication to the point of near-constant silence.

Common in all was a perpetual tiredness, the type caused by extended periods of sleep deprivation because of the constant sound of war around them – of air-raid sirens and explosions.

Many are haunted by memories of death and destruction.

Through a car window, clouded by condensation from his shallow breath, one child watched a Russian soldier execute his grandfather at a checkpoint leaving Volnovakha, a Ukrainian town captured by Russian forces in March 2022. Some saw their homes turn to smoke and rubble. Others heard the thundering boom of missiles striking a car park in the central city of Vinnytsia, an attack that killed more than 20 including a toddler pushing a pram. Some have been orphaned, others abandoned. All hope for a life without war.

In late January, a mobile team comprising a psychologist and support worker from local charity Slavic Heart was dispatched from Vinnytsia to a house on its rural outskirts. They had come to know the journey well.

It was -17C and the cold had been seeping into the three-room farmhouse for several days. Andrey, 16, sat by the window, drawing.

Andrey was diagnosed with Down's syndrome when he lived in Selydove, Donetsk. The town was largely destroyed and claimed by Russian forces in October 2024, but his family had already escaped to the rented house in the Vinnytsia region by then. That's when his health worsened.

"His medication stopped working," his mother told *The Telegraph*. "He cried the whole day, uncontrollably. I couldn't reach the doctors because they were all busy. Most nights he couldn't sleep. He'd wake up scared, afraid to lose us."

Throughout this winter, the coldest in more than a decade, Russia has mercilessly attacked Ukraine's electricity grid, plunging millions of Ukrainians into regular bouts of freezing darkness. To the south of Kyiv, a secondary school was emptied of its 800 students for most of January after Russian strikes knocked out power and heating in the district. In the odd week when regular classes returned, teachers were instructed not to wake up students who fell asleep during lessons.

> 'Mama cannot be frightened, Mama needs to be the superhero'

Daniil, 14, is one of 400 new students from the east of Ukraine who enrolled at the school when the war began. "Exercise is the only way I can stay warm at night," he said. His classmate Anna, 13, prefers playing her electric piano loudly when she hears the explosions over her family's apartment. "I can't stop the bombs with my hands, so I just use them to play instead," she said.

According to the United Nations, one in three children in Ukraine have witnessed someone being killed or injured during the last four years of war. One in five reported losing a friend or relative. In front-line regions, 83 per cent of young children have shown signs of emotional distress and delayed development.

For Yuliya's three young boys, they can't sleep alone because of the fear of something happening to them. Her youngest, Misha, was a toddler when Russian soldiers stormed into their home in Kherson in southern Ukraine.

"They would have burned our house down if they had found men's clothes in my wardrobe," she said. "I took my children and left Kherson quickly after that." Yuliya now lives in a damp, ground-floor apartment outside the city of Kropyvnytskyi, about 125 miles from the front line.

But the war has taken its toll. Her children live in a constant state of anxiety – and that means Yuliya must be their anchor.

"Mama cannot be frightened. Mama needs to be the superhero," she said as she wiped away her tears.

For millions of children in Ukraine, the memories of a peaceful past fade further with each new attack. As they emerge from another winter still at war, their futures remain uncertain and more endangered than ever.

Some children's names have been changed

MIRJA VOGEL

Awaiting another night of terror: Artem, 11, Maria, seven, Dmytro, eight, and Anatoly, 10, at their Ukraine home

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THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

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Trump must now finish the job

If Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has indeed been killed, he has met the end he deserved: dragged from the rubble of his compound, the death of a butcher announced to scenes of wild celebration of his victims and their families in the streets of Tehran, the supreme leader who promised the destruction of Israel dead in an Israeli airstrike.

For all the fury from the Iranian regime's friends and useful idiots in the West, this conflict did not start with US and Israeli jets and missiles breaking into the skies over Tehran on Saturday. The ayatollahs have been at war with the West for 47 years, sponsoring terrorism, fomenting extremism, brutally repressing dissent, launching missiles and bombs at military and civilian targets indiscriminately.

What now appear to have been the last acts of Khamenei's leadership followed in this vein. As targeted strikes rained down on critical sites, Tehran lashed out wildly. Suicide drones and missiles struck a tower block in Bahrain and a hotel in Dubai; the Revolutionary Guard has declared that the Strait of Hormuz – through which 20pc of the world's oil and gas supply travels – was closed to shipping.

It was a blatant attempt to ignite a wider regional conflict in the hope that the fear and hesitancy of weaker leaders would somehow convince Donald Trump to change his plans. Such hopes were in vain, but shamefully the strategy appeared to have its desired effect on some. While Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and Reform leader Nigel Farage rightly expressed solidarity with and support for the United States, Green leader Zack Polanski absurdly described both as "rogue states".

Regrettably, Sir Keir Starmer was closer to the latter than the former. His spokesman did not lend support to the US-Israeli operation, but instead feebly reiterated that the Government had "continually supported efforts to reach a negotiated solution", and that its priority was the "safety of UK nationals in the region".

If this had truly been the case – indeed, if the safety of UK nationals in Britain itself had been the Government's priority – then Sir Keir would have given the United States every possible assistance in its attempt to force regime change. Khamenei's regime has been a stain on humanity, vile, repressive, and brutal at home. If this were not enough reason for Britain to assist in its destruction, then the 15 separate attempts at the murder or kidnap of people on British soil should have been ample motivation.

The Prime Minister evidently felt otherwise. In the build-up to the conflict, Sir Keir denied the US airforce the use of critical UK airbases over legal concerns. Even as the bombs fell, he was to be found triangulating between the Left and Right of his party. Beyond a joint non-statement with France and Germany urging Iran to "refrain from indiscriminate military strikes", his major concern has been to emphasise that British planes have "played no role" in the operation, apparently proud of his political cowardice.

The word "decadence" generally conjures images far more exciting than a grey-suited man droning on about international law, but it is hard to think of a better description of the attitude on display in Downing Street: insulated by distance from the Middle East and Ukraine, Sir Keir has put his obsessions with international law ahead of the most fundamental duties of the state.

For all the criticism that can justifiably levelled at Mr Trump, this flaw is not one he possesses. Having apparently taken out the most senior leadership of the Iranian state, he must now understand that this is a singular moment which will make or break his presidency. If he emerges victorious, with the threat from Tehran quelled, he will have remade the Middle East in a single stroke, and ended one of the greatest threats to the world order. If he backs down with the work half done, he invites disaster.

Mr Trump must not heed the voices calling for the United States to return to the negotiating table, or to accept a partial victory and a symbolic change of leader, but see his chosen course of action through to the end. The Iranian regime is built on an Islamist doctrine that cannot meaningfully be negotiated with. It is a millenarian cult which will not change its form under the mere threat of annihilation; the beliefs espoused by the Revolutionary Guard view the destruction of Israel as necessary.

We have seen, for 47 years, the fruits of attempting to negotiate with fanatics. This belief cannot be altered, or made somehow palatable. It can only be destroyed. Removing Khamenei is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The Iranian nuclear and missile programmes must be erased, key military assets and personnel eliminated, the leadership devastated until the regime is brought to a point of fatal weakness. No matter what slings and arrows may come his way, the US president must stay the course.

Mr Trump did not start this conflict. He may go down in history as the president who finished it through the military action his predecessors were too weak to take. As jets took to the skies, Mr Trump addressed the "great, proud people of Iran" to say that "the hour of your freedom is at hand".

The United States would open the door for the population to liberate themselves, he said, adding this "is the moment for action. Do not let it pass". With cheers ringing in Tehran, he must stand by these words and finish the job.

LETTERS *to the* EDITOR

Donald Trump is right to have taken decisive action against Iran's odious regime

SIR – Stephen Pollard hits the nail on the head ("Donald Trump has just demonstrated the decisive leadership the West needs", telegraph.co.uk, February 28).

President Trump has shown more backbone than all the European leaders combined. Our own Prime Minister is an embarrassment.

Negotiations with Iran have dragged on for decades, and been used as a stalling tactic by Tehran while it pursues nuclear weapons and regional supremacy. The destruction of this odious regime will bring monumental benefits to the people of Iran, the Middle East and the world.

Alan Tomlinson
Cheadle, Cheshire

SIR – America and its allies must now, once and for all, remove the tyrannical regime in Tehran, free the Iranian people, and end the threat to the Middle East and global security.

Dominic Shelmerdine
London SW3

SIR – Our weak Prime Minister equivocated about the American and Israeli action against Iran, while Dame Emily Thornberry condemned it as a breach of international law.

This is the same international law that has allowed Iran to become the largest sponsor of global terrorism, is continuing to look on as the mullahs attempt to enrich uranium, and has seemingly failed to notice that the regime has recently murdered thousands of its own citizens.

If these aren't imminent threats, I'm not sure what meets that definition. A nuclear warhead on its way to London from Tehran, perhaps.

Well done to Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage for their immediate support of our allies.

Fred Fearn
Burton Bradstock, Dorset

SIR – Well, Mr Trump, do you think you deserve a Nobel Peace Prize now?

George Kelly
Buckingham

Worthless degrees

SIR – Kemi Badenoch is correct that young people have been "stitched up" as a result of Tony Blair's push for 50 per cent of school-leavers to go to university (Comment, February 22).

She also rightly draws attention to the poor quality of many "useless courses", which give no tangible benefits. The high drop-out rate from such courses has led to young people starting their adult lives with high levels of debt, and no higher-education qualification to show for it.

However, Mrs Badenoch fails to mention that this misguided policy began under the Conservative administration, led by her predecessor, John Major, which compelled polytechnics that taught useful, career-focused, vocational subjects to become universities. This change of name did not lead to a more meritocratic system, as many graduate employers still insisted that candidates had to have attended a Russell Group university and achieved at least an upper-second-class degree.

Successive governments, along with schools, parents and guardians, have pressurised young people to go to university regardless of their suitability. It would not surprise me if this became a mis-selling scandal, with a sizeable percentage of student debt eventually being written off.

Keeley Cavendish
London SE21

SIR – Ben Marlow is spot on ("A generation of students have been sold a lie", Business, February 24).

I was fortunate enough to avoid higher education. Most school-leavers did in 1965, when only about 5 per cent went to university. I did collect a couple of A-levels, however, and went on to have a successful and highly remunerated career in banking and as an entrepreneur.

Tony Blair's 50 per cent target was always going to end in tears, especially as some 30 per cent of school-leavers have no qualifications whatsoever. Nevertheless, this policy, and the flawed student loan scheme, not to mention the Left-wing bias of lecturers, have done terrible harm to millions of young people.

Howard M Tolman
Great Cornard, Suffolk

SIR – I congratulate Kemi Badenoch and the Conservatives on their new approach to student finances.

Having spent 50 years teaching in the university sector, and also employing students, I now advise extreme caution before undertaking a degree course. Apprenticeships in skilled trades are the best way forward for a significant proportion of young people: we will always need plumbers, electricians and carpenters.

Pamela Wheeler
Shrewsbury

By-election message

SIR – The voters of Gorton and Denton have sent a clear message to Labour and the Conservatives: a plague o' both your houses (report, February 27). Thankfully, most of them were not fooled by Reform UK.

The electorate is usually correct. Now we must wait to see who, if anyone, receives its message and begins to set matters right.

Christopher Jary
Frampton, Dorset

SIR – Apathy wins yet again. While the Greens are to be congratulated on winning the seat, the turnout of less than 50 per cent shows that no party is offering an agreeable solution to the nation's problems.

We should take advantage of the fact that we have an elected Government with a substantial majority. Whatever our political persuasion, we must support the Prime Minister to get this once-proud country get back on its feet.

Labour needs to stop the infighting, and use the next three years to put things right.

Jon Nurhonen
Hayle, Cornwall

SIR – Given the present state of disrepair of the Houses of Parliament, it might prove useful that the new Member for Gorton and Denton is a plumber.

Juliet Henderson
South Warnborough, Hampshire

Cost of nuclear power

SIR – You report that the cost of Hinkley Point C – originally forecast to be £18bn – has risen to an estimated £48bn (Business, February 21).

This should come as no surprise to readers who have followed EDF's efforts to build power stations across Europe on time and on budget.

Here in Suffolk, we are already used to costs being revised upwards for Sizewell C, which is why the initials EDF are accepted as being shorthand for Extremely Dodgy Figures.

Mick Wharton
Halesworth, Suffolk

SIR – Tone Langengen says "we will still rely on oil and gas for decades", and argues that a new world order of resurgent nationalism and "intense geopolitical competition" calls for a reversal of the ban on new North Sea oil and gas licences ("Treating the North Sea as a moral test risks the UK importing what it could produce at home", Business, February 20).

It is remarkable that, as weather systems collapse around the world, with records falling like ninepins, she still can't see the writing on the wall.

We need urgent multilateral action to drive down emissions, and any country that refuses to join this project should be ostracised.

Professor Jason Scott-Warren
Faculty of English, University of Cambridge

Influences on the Bard

SIR – In his article, "No, Shakespeare wasn't a black woman" (telegraph.co.uk, January 24), Philip Womack criticises the revival of the claim that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare. On that point, we agree. The documentary record confirms that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays published under his name.

It was therefore disappointing to see the translator and playwright Thomas North associated with this discredited authorship controversy. Scholars have long acknowledged that Shakespeare drew upon earlier plays, including several written in the 16th century prior to his career. Arthur Brooke, for instance, referred to Romeo and Juliet in 1562, two years before Shakespeare was born. Our work on newly examined North-family manuscripts connects Thomas North to these pre-Shakespearean plays. In each case, we demonstrate how Shakespeare later revised and transformed that earlier material. To dismiss this research as anti-Stratfordian by association is misleading.

Dennis McCarthy
North Hampton, New Hampshire, United States

June Schlueter
Easton, Pennsylvania, United States

Lunch in reverse

SIR – The backwards lunch served by Heston Blumenthal is not quite as innovative as your feature (February 22) suggests. In the City in the 1980s, it was a feature of many client entertainments.

A typical "lunch" would comprise a large "Southampton" (port), ice-cream with Sauternes, steak-and-kidney pie with a red, and prawn cocktail with a Muscadet – in that order. All washed down with a large G&T. Such was its popularity, it even made it to a restaurant in the Italian village of Cervinia during the ski season, much to the amazement of the waiting staff.

Matthew West
Westerham, Kent

SIR – Heston Blumenthal's topsy-turvy lunch reminded me of a weekend 50 years ago, when some friends and I attempted a back-to-front day.

Dressed in in dinner jackets, we started with cigars and brandy at 9am. Coffee and chocolates followed, then a pudding, a main course and a starter, all washed down with carefully chosen wines. The wheels nearly came off when we moved on to canapés and cocktails, before going up to change into suitable clothes for an after-lunch walk. We had tea – cake first, then cucumber sandwiches – at about 11am, and our walk was followed by a liquid luncheon, with pudding first, quite possibly at 1pm. I don't think any of us made it through to breakfast at 8pm, but we did laugh a lot.

Charles Heneage
Heythrop, Oxfordshire

ALAMY

A statue by Zeng Chenggang, close to Engels's birthplace in Wuppertal, Germany

A communist who liked the finer things in life

SIR – I read with interest that the Amy Read Trust, which owns the house in north London occupied for many years by Friedrich Engels, plans to open a museum there dedicated to the co-author of *The Communist Manifesto* (report, February 22). Residents are rightly concerned that it could become a focal point for Left-wing gatherings.

If the changes to the property go ahead, I hope that due prominence will be given to aspects of Engels's life that his Left-wing admirers might wish to keep under the carpet.

The scion of a wealthy German mill-owning family, he was essentially exiled to Manchester to become a partner in the jointly owned family business of Ermen and Engels, of Victoria Mill, Salford. This was a sewing thread manufacturer, which prospered greatly under his direction, when Manchester was the world centre of textile production.

Engels was a passionate supporter of fox hunting, and a very enthusiastic subscriber to the Cheshire Hunt, rarely missing a meet during the season. It is said that he was one of the brash young men often chastised for moving off before the fox had left its cover.

He supported Marx financially, enabling him and his daughters to maintain a comfortable middle-class life.

When he died, Engels left an estate that would be valued in multiple millions today, and an extensive and valuable wine cellar, both at home and with his merchant.

If these aspects of his life are publicised, then the worried residents of Primrose Hill may perhaps rest easier about the "loony Left" turning it into a revolutionary shrine.

John H Lowe
Rossendale, Lancashire

Silent reading

SIR – Robert Douglas-Fairhurst makes an excellent case for slow reading (Arts, February 21). The rot set in in around 400AD, when St Augustine of Hippo observed St Ambrose reading silently: "But while reading, his eyes glanced over the pages, and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent" (*Confessions*.6.3).

Bernard Richards
Brasenose College, Oxford

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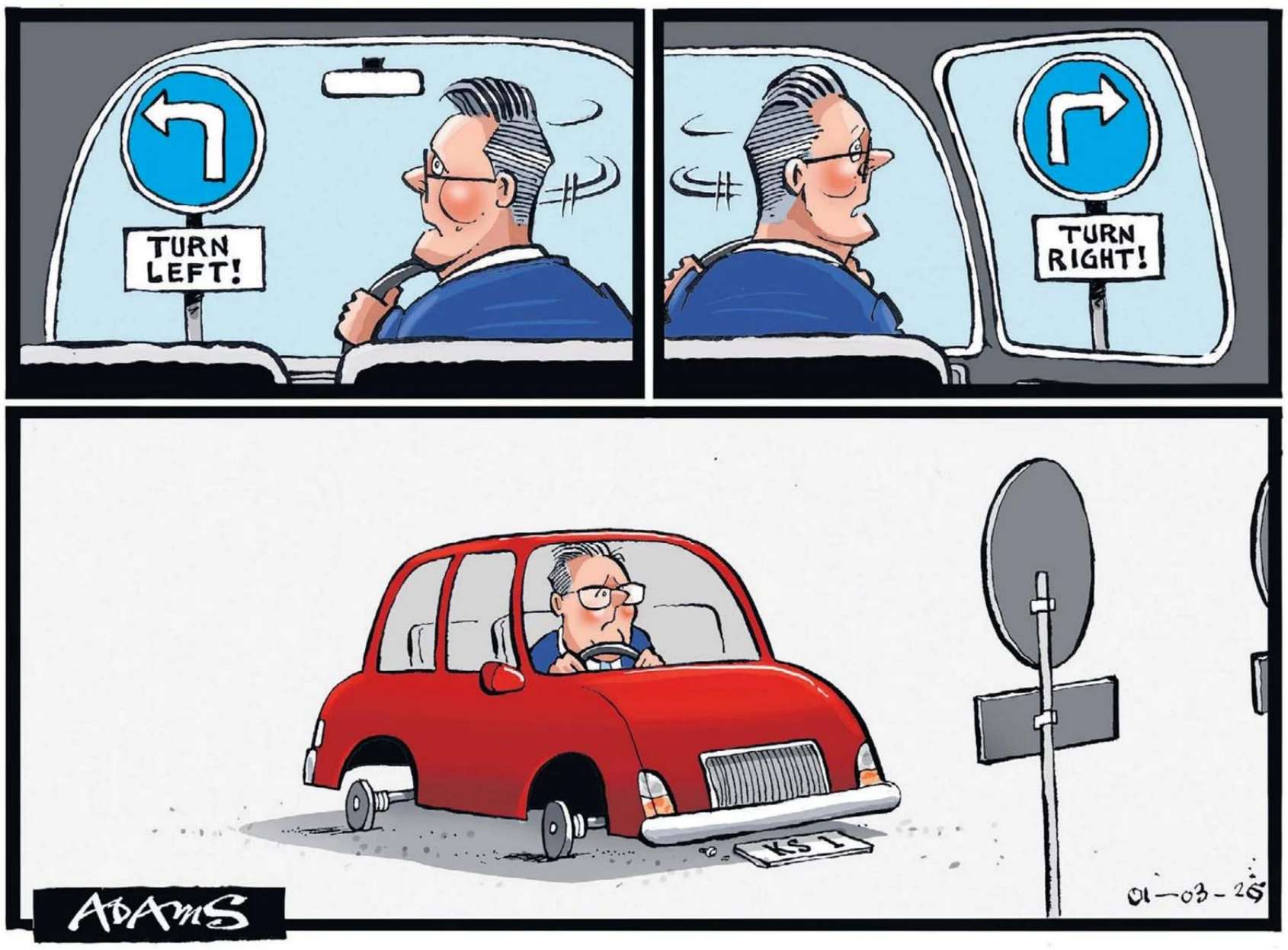

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ROBIN AITKEN

Turness reveals the delusion at the heart of the BBC

When a news organisation is almost entirely composed of Left-leaning people, it is no surprise the output mirrors their views

For a seasoned journalist in one of the biggest jobs in the British news media, there is something charmingly naive about Deborah Turness. The former head of BBC News disarmingly admits that few BBC journalists will be putting a cross next to the Reform candidate at the next election, but she doesn't think that presents a problem for the corporation's vaunted "impartiality".

BBC bosses talk of "impartiality" as if it's some magic quality somehow implanted in every BBC journalist, presumably on that happy day when they are first admitted onto the corporation's payroll. In this telling, it's rather like a religious conversion – "now you're in, you're impartial". There was another former senior BBC executive who used to talk about his journalists clocking in in the morning and "hanging their politics up with their coat". See? So simple.

The latest assertions were made at a US media boondoggle about "restoring trust in the media" – but just in case Ms Turness hasn't worked it out for herself, here is a beginner's guide to how bias creeps into the BBC's news output.

Let us accept – as I do – that very few BBC journos are Reform supporters. I'd go a little further and say that very few of them are Conservative voters. So the reality in BBC newsrooms is that there will always be a majority of journalists whose lean to the centre-Left.

Now picture the scene when the daily news meeting happens in the morning: which stories do you imagine will most interest those journalists? My own experience is that the ones that most interest BBC journalists are the same ones that dominate the pages of Left-leaning newspapers such as *The Guardian*. Stories given prominence in papers like *The Telegraph* or *Daily Mail* are often overlooked. So here's the first way bias seeps in: by story selection.

Further along in the process bias colours the output because of the way the building blocks of any story are assembled: who is to be interviewed? Which clip from that interview will be used? From which angle – positive or negative – do we approach this story? It's a very subtle process, familiar to any journalist who stops for a moment to consider it, and it means that achieving "impartiality" in spite of your own inbuilt prejudices is very difficult.

BBC sophisticates, when talking about the problem of bias, prefer to use the term "revealed preferences". I think it's a very good phrase, because when you consume BBC output with a sceptical eye you can work out exactly what those "revealed preferences" are. A preference for the EU over Brexit; a firm belief in an all-pervasive racism which disadvantages all non-white people; a preference for Joe Biden over Donald Trump.

The last one is particularly salient given that Mr Trump is currently attempting to sue the BBC out of existence. In Ms Turness's view, the *Panorama* documentary that caused all the trouble can be put down to a little sloppy editing – just a mistake.

That is fanciful. A programme such as *Panorama* is carefully assembled to tell a pre-determined story; to wit, that the US president was a dangerous demagogue who urged his supporters to attack the Capitol.

It was the culmination of years of coverage during which the BBC showed itself hostile to Mr Trump. The broadcaster's code of "impartiality" put no brake on its wholeheartedly negative coverage of the US president because when you assemble a journalistic workforce comprised overwhelmingly of Left-liberal people, what you get is Left-liberal output. And that's the whole truth of it.

Robin Aitken is a former BBC journalist

The Panorama scandal was the culmination of years of coverage in which the BBC showed itself hostile to Trump

JAKE WALLIS SIMONS

The world's most evil regime is on the brink – no thanks to Britain

Starmer's response to the US and Israeli strikes on Iran was more Chamberlain than Churchill

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Where was Britain? As missiles reportedly killed the Ayatollah in Tehran, his office in London remained open. His ambassador has not been expelled. His Revolutionary Guards have not been banned in this country, even as they are under attack in their own.

Iran, together with its allies in Beijing and Moscow, is the clearest global evil since the Nazi regime. Its tentacles stretch into Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq, and into the campuses, mosques and protest movements of Britain. Yet our response has been more Neville Chamberlain than Winston Churchill.

What will it take for us to call an enemy an enemy? Domestically, the regime has murdered more than 40,000 citizens for the crime of calling for freedom. It has removed the uteruses of female protesters, injected prisoners with toxic substances, executed wounded activists in their hospital beds and demanded huge sums to return corpses of loved ones. The scenes of mothers weeping over the bodies of their children have been unbearable.

Abroad, the regime is the foremost sponsor of terror, giving birth to Hezbollah, sponsoring Hamas and mounting scores of assassination and kidnap plots on British soil. Through its proxies, it runs a narcotics network stretching from Latin America to the Middle East, with supplies of Captagon alone fostering widespread addiction, violence and criminality.

Behind it all is a fanatical theology that lusts after an apocalyptic war to trigger the coming of the Mahdi, a 10th-century cleric who will supposedly return from invisibility to conquer the globe in the endtime. This is not an empty faith. For 47 years, the Ayatollah has been plotting to fulfil this prophecy with a triune strategy of proxy militia, ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.

That is where Iran's resources and ingenuity have gone. While its citizens have languished in poverty atop the second-largest gas reserves on Earth, more than half-a-trillion dollars was spent on a failed nuclear programme and about $2bn a year on proxy militia, for the sake of little more than bigotry and superstition.

Iran could have been a G20 country. Instead, in the fume-filled Palestine Square in central Tehran, a public clock counts down the hours to the supposed destruction of the Jewish state. Well, yesterday, while Britain blocked American warplanes from RAF bases because of "international law", Israel and the US called time on that countdown by rising to strangle the octopus.

The move was bold and fraught with risk. Without boots on the ground, there is no guarantee that the regime, which holds a monopoly on weapons in the country, will fall. If it does, there is no guarantee that a free, stable and democratic nation will emerge from the chaos.

But sometimes evil demands courage. What odds faced our soldiers on D-Day, or our pilots during the Battle of Britain? Which returns us to No10. Hours after the war began, neither our Prime Minister nor his Foreign Secretary, fresh from humiliation at the hands of a political Islamist insurgency in Gorton and Danton, had even issued a public statement.

Kemi Badenoch was clear, saying: "I stand by our allies in the US and Israel as they take on the threat of the Islamic Republic of Iran." Nigel Farage damned the "evil regime" and called on the Prime Minister to "back the Americans in this vital fight". What did Sir Keir Starmer have to say?

After several hours, we found out. The Prime Minister's statement highlighted that Britain had "played no role in these strikes" and bleated about "de-escalation". True, he condemned the Iranian regime as "utterly abhorrent". But he has used far stronger language before, about Elon Musk's Grok, say, or the riots in Southport.

Some of the RAF's 150 fighter planes – by comparison, the US has more than 1,600, Israel has 350 and Iran has about 250 – had been deployed defensively in the region. But we flew no sorties against the world's most repulsive regime, relegating our once-proud country to a footnote as history unfolded around us.

Are we secretly rather fond of the Tehran regime? Certainly, that's true of the Gaza activists: at recent marches, the flag of the regime has fluttered alongside the colours of Palestine. To them, Israel is the sole organising principle of the universe. Blinded by their slavish devotion to that single cause, they are unable to condemn any evil that is the enemy of the Jews.

How October 7 has made us lose our minds! Hostilities may be long over in Gaza but in Britain they are just getting started. Red paint is smeared over bakeries, Gaza independents sit in Parliament, Jews live in fear and Labour – which shamefully recognised Palestine without conditions – has been branded "Zionist" by rabble rousers. Even the Green Party is flirting with swapping its hemp sandals and veganism for a formal endorsement of the old Soviet propaganda claim that "Zionism is racism".

The day before bombs fell on Iran, Churchill's statue overlooking Parliament was defaced with slogans calling for an "intifada". It couldn't be clearer. They hate Britain, they hate the West and they hate the Jews. The Ayatollah? Just a very naughty boy.

According to Zack Polanski, who fancies himself as our next prime minister, the campaign against the sickening Iranian regime was "an illegal, unprovoked and brutal attack that shows once again that the USA and Israel are rogue states". The strategic genius that is Ed Davey demanded that Britain "rules out the use of UK bases for any future unilateral US strikes".

From Jeremy Corbyn and the former Conservative Baroness Sayeeda Warsi to the lamentable chairwoman of the foreign affairs select committee Emily Thornberry, a great chorus went up to prevent us from attacking Iran. Let's put it clearly: the worst people have been making the worst arguments in defence of the world's worst regime.

Compare all this with the cousins of our culture. In Israel, 20,000 reservists were called up while missiles rained down on Jerusalem. In the bomb shelters, crowds were filmed dancing and singing out of love for their people and the dream of a free Persia.

On the streets of Tehran, meanwhile, amid the carnage and trepidation, people cheered on American and Israeli jets and danced defiantly in the streets. They know the price of liberty and are prepared to pay it. What courage. Imagine if Britain had not lost its way.

ZOE STRIMPEL

There is something fishy about the sustainability brigade

At a time of depleted mackerel stocks, why aren't Zack Polanski and his chums focusing more on ocean conservation and less on Palestine?

Some important news last week was a bit lost in the maelstrom: a major British supermarket is to stop selling mackerel. I know Trump has attacked Iran, and Britain inches closer every day to apocalypse – but the idea that we will no longer be able to buy smoked mackerel (peppered or otherwise), mackerel pâté, or tinned mackerel is a blow, at least to this smoked fish lover.

The reasoning, as you might imagine, is to do with sustainability. Mackerel are apparently overfished, the implication being that at current rates of trawling, our waters may clean run out of them. Which would be a truly distressing extinction event. Especially as in recent years, the benefits of their oily, omega-3-rich flesh have been trumpeted far and wide; Tim Spector, the pro-gut professor and nutritionist, often cites the fish as a regular part of his diet.

Mackerel used to be considered a sustainable option but, in the past few years, stocks from the north Atlantic and North Sea have dwindled considerably. In light of this, the decision to cut back seems sensible and one day we will be able to eat it again.

See, when it comes to greenism, there is only one non-ludicrous branch: conservation, which is rooted in the intuitive idea that nature and its life forms are an end in themselves, and it is good for humans as well as animals and plants to preserve them. I am less convinced by the idea of "sustainability" – look at us, saving the planet one wooden fork at a time! But at least it inspires creative business and enterprise.

Of course, if a party was serious about the environment, including helping populations in the poor southern parts of the world who are most subject to the ravages of climate change, it would focus like a laser on reversing global warming. Not boasting about wooden forks.

Back to the mackerel policy. This came as a jolt not just because of the horror of being denied our favourite spread, but because it is a reminder of how far the political green agenda has morphed and migrated away from what one would have thought were its core issues. The Green Party – newly emboldened by the voter fraud-riddled Gorton and Denton by-election win – is now entirely dominated by have-a-go revolutionary populism. This gang makes only minimal attempts to tether concern for the environment (which they always call the "climate") to their -real reasons for existing: stoking up hatred for those who work hard and earn, and fomenting unrest.

As Green Party leader Zack Polanski put it in a Q&A last year for the website Context: "It is the multimillionaires and billionaires and their high-polluting lifestyles that are disproportionately destroying the environment, communities, and democracy. So, ultimately, tackling the inequality crisis is exactly the way to tackle both the climate and nature crises." Eh?

This way of thinking is exactly why the party was so ripe for total takeover by pro-Palestine obsessives and Israel-hating, often openly Jew-hating narcissists.

The environmental movement has always been disfigured by arsonists, terrorists, vandals and other criminals acting in the name of animals. In its modern political form, Greta Thunberg is the most concise description of its trajectory: from anti-Western, anti-progress, anti-human climate activism laced with criminality to the same set of values and tactics, only transferred entirely to the cause of "Palestine".

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Sadly, in the British Green Party today, forged in Greta's image, the fish don't get a look in. Nor the trees. Only the Jews.

On Friday, following the Greens' sinister Gorton and Denton win, the Conservative peer and former MP Zac Goldsmith, someone who actually cares about nature and its ecosystems, including the human one, summed it up well.

On X, he posted a picture of a dead insect none the less crawling because a different insect had infiltrated it. "The insect is dead, but a different organism has taken control of its nerves and is now in total control of its direction," he wrote. "It has invaded the insect's body, grown inside it, and now manipulates its behaviour to complete its own life cycle – just like what has happened to the Green Party."

The Greens were always prone to destructive, anti-Western, anti-capitalist thinking and for years much of their platform has been about forcing commitment to net zero deadlines. But there were, and are, some people still motivated by questions about rivers, water quality and wildlife, even if some of this is bundled up in more lunacy, such as the "rights of nature" act, which would make "nature" a party to legal proceedings.

You have to know where to look on the party's website to find anything about ducks and fish and trees and hedgehogs. The manifesto lists fairness – a manipulative byword for unfairly seizing other people's assets – before greenness in the party's priority list, which tells you all you need to know.

If the Greens thought more about the state of our mackerel stocks and less about Gaza and revolution, the country would be in a much better state. But then, it wouldn't be this country, or this world, in 2026, but a saner, better, parallel universe.

DANIEL HANNAN

Adam Smith started a revolution 250 years ago. There is still time to rescue it

The shy Scot's economic theory introduced a new way of seeing the world, but today free markets are under attack

Next week marks the 250th anniversary of one of the greatest revolutions in human history. I am not talking of the unrest in the Americas which, at the start of March 1776, was still largely a matter of blockades, ambuscades and skirmishes. The American Revolution proper was still some months away.

No, I am using the word in its wider sense: an event that renders our former habits and assumptions obsolete. The revolution of March 1776 was the publication, by a shy and awkward university lecturer, of a book called *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

Like Charles Darwin or Albert Einstein, Adam Smith introduced his public to a new way of seeing the world, a way they could not subsequently unsee. He prompted what the American philosopher Thomas Kuhn would call a paradigm shift, a fundamental alteration of our basic premises. *The Wealth of Nations* was the first work of economics, but it did not just create a new science, it created a new world.

Like Einstein's, and unlike Darwin's, Smith's theory appeared, at first blush, implausible. We can easily enough grasp the idea of natural selection: as the anthropologist Thomas Henry Huxley remarked after reading *On the Origin of Species*: "How extremely stupid not to have thought of that!" By contrast, Einstein's discovery that space and time are not fixed, but are stretched by gravity and motion, appears uncanny.

In much the same way, Smith's ideas, however logical, run up against our intuitions. We are social primates, accustomed to being led. We struggle with the idea that an economy left to itself will be more prosperous than one guided by human oversight. We wonder how a nation can get all the supplies it needs when no one is in charge of provisioning it. We resent depending on unseen strangers. We can't understand how it is in our country's interest to trade with more efficient competitors.

The best way to soothe these doubts is to read Smith's book. If you don't fancy taking on both volumes, Eamonn Butler of the Adam Smith Institute is marking the anniversary by bringing out a short, graphic version, like an *Asterix* book – which, trust me, is much more gripping than I have made it sound.

Smith writes about the world as it is. His work, as we might pretentiously put it, is empirical rather than normative. He could not be less like Karl Marx who, while purporting to be scientific, wrote about an imaginary and, as we now know, impossible world. You have your book, comrades, and we have ours; and ours works in real life, as can be seen by comparing East Germany with West Germany, or North Korea with South Korea.

The Wealth of Nations was an immediate bestseller. Pitt the Younger was smitten, as were Lord Liverpool and Sir Robert Peel. All three prime ministers acted on the ideas of the great Langtonian (as people from Kirkcaldy are called). They cut tariffs and removed regulations, making Britain the wealthiest country on Earth.

Smith's truths, while not obvious, are straightforward. First, specialisation is the basis of wealth. He offered the deliberately trivial example of pins. You, working on your own, would take all day to produce a single pin; but 10 workers in a factory, each concentrating on one aspect of the process, can make 48,000. The extension of that principle is the story of human progress. We get richer by becoming more specialised as producers and more diversified as consumers.

> The Wealth of Nations was a bestseller and its ideas led to Britain becoming the richest country on Earth

Second, specialisation does not stop at borders. A country does not become stronger by making from scratch things that it could buy more cheaply from abroad. This applies equally to sectors that we consider strategically vital; indeed, these are precisely the sectors where we should want the best products. In our own lives, we apply this principle unhesitatingly. We do not grow our own food, sew our own clothes or build our own cars. We know that the results would be inferior, and that the lost hours would leave us poorer. That does not cease to be true as we scale up to national level.

Third, imports are a benefit, not a cost. This insight flew in the face of the prevailing mercantilist philosophy of Smith's time, which held that a nation got rich by running trade surpluses and hoarding gold. Smith pointed out that bullion had no value other than as a way to acquire what you truly wanted. "If a nation could be separated from all the world, it would be of no consequence how much, or how little money circulated in it." The sole purpose of production was consumption; the sole purpose of exports was to pay for imports.

DAVID CHESKIN/PA

Economic genius: monument to Adam Smith in Royal Mile, Edinburgh

Fourth, free exchange means that we become wealthier ourselves by enriching our neighbours. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."

All these points are counter-intuitive. The idea that we are enriched by people we might never meet, and whom we might not like if we did, is difficult. The notion that, by pursuing their own desires, they are incidentally making us better off does not sit easily with our neural wiring, which evolved in an age when we shared meat after communal hunts.

Smith knew his ideas would be unpopular. "To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain, is as absurd as to expect that a Utopia should ever be established in it."

In every generation, from his day to ours, the people who have read his book are vastly outnumbered by those who prefer to hook a thumb in their braces, suck their teeth, and tell us that free trade is all very well in theory but globalisation and China and something-or-other means it doesn't work in practice. It is, as I say, human nature to start with our hunches and reason backward.

In support of our prejudices, we block out a great deal of evidence. We struggle to accept that living standards are higher than they were a generation ago, or that global poverty is disappearing. We focus on losses and ignore gains – concentrating, for example, on the jobs displaced by new technologies rather than on those created. We vote for politicians, whether of the Donald Trump or Zack Polanski type, who sell protectionism as a way to defend the little guy from the corporates – the precise opposite of what it is.

Even the real-world impact of tariffs, unless we get full-scale 1930s beggar-my-neighbour trade wars, rarely shifts our thinking. There is undeniable evidence that the Trump tariffs have reduced wages, jobs, growth and investment. Obviously, they have not caused a 1930s-style depression, partly because most trade is now in services, and so unaffected, and, partly because, in an economy as large as that of the US, a terrible tariff policy can be offset by sensible policies on energy abundance, AI and deregulation.

> The undeniable evidence is that Trump's tariffs have reduced wages, jobs, growth and investment

Still, the evidence is there: the US is growing more slowly as a result of making goods more expensive.

Do voters care? No. Those who already disliked Trump oppose his tariff policy, and those who liked him support it. As I say, we lead with our gut feelings – and never more so than in an age of screen addiction, when young people find it increasingly difficult to get through a long-form article, let alone a whole book.

We are entering a post-Enlightenment age, an age in which we will no longer rely on the scientific method, apply logic or consider data that challenges our prejudices. Perhaps it is inevitable, as our attention spans shrink, that we shall return to a pre-modern understanding of trade and markets. Perhaps a more general retreat from liberal individualism will follow. Perhaps Adam Smith will seem as alien to our grandchildren as Synesius of Cyrene or John of Rupescissa do to us. (Who? Precisely.) Ah, well, 250 years is a pretty good run for any revolution.

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NIGEL FARAGE

Family voting is a monstrous attack on our democracy

The very basis of the privacy of the polling booth – the right to a secret ballot – is being destroyed

At last I no longer feel like a lone voice crying out in the wilderness that there is something fundamentally wrong with the way British elections are conducted. And that this is a particular problem in inner-city areas with a high Muslim population. What happened in Gorton and Denton on Thursday was absolutely monstrous and action needs to be taken now.

A reputable organisation of election observers called Democracy Volunteers visited polling stations in that Manchester by-election. As the polls closed, they reported that in 68 per cent of the polling stations they visited, they had witnessed an illegal practice known as "family voting". What that means is that the very basis of the privacy of the polling booth, of your right to a secret ballot, was being destroyed.

Husbands and wives, and sometimes whole family groups, were going into the polling booths together. Many of them did not speak English as a first language. Some of them did not speak English at all. But on the instructions of the head of the family their vote was overseen. Their "X" had to go in the right box. On this occasion that was for the Green Party, which seemed to care far more about Gaza than it did about Gorton and Denton.

This abominable attack on democracy should open up a bigger and more fundamental debate about our electoral system. If that level of pressure was being applied at the polling booths, can you even imagine the levels of coercion that might take place around postal voting at home?

I have been campaigning on this cause now for many years, starting with the 2015 Oldham West and Royton by-election, which I described as bent. What I saw at the Peterborough by-election in 2019, however, was even worse. On election day we saw a supermarket bag being delivered to a central polling station, stuffed with 1,000 votes. I complained, Richard Tice and I attempted legal action, but we didn't get anywhere.

Nobody has made any effort to amend the law. We must all wake up. I have reported what happened in polling stations in Gorton and Denton to the local police. I have also written to the Electoral Commission. Something must be done to restore the public's faith in our democratic processes, and it should begin now, as we approach a massive set of elections on May 7.

Every seat in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd, every London borough and thousands of council seats around the country are up for grabs that day. Local police forces must make sure that returning officers in polling stations are enforcing the law and the principle that has stood for more than 150 years. Namely, that the ballot is secret and only one adult at a time is allowed into the polling booth.

We also need to think hard about whether Commonwealth citizens should have the right to vote in British parliamentary elections, given that, as we saw on Thursday, their priorities often centre on events that are taking place thousands of miles away.

Above all, we must scrap the postal voting register as it is currently constituted. You should need to have a good reason to request a postal vote, backed up by documentary evidence. Postal votes should not constitute more than 1 or 2 per cent of the overall turn-out. Let's remember, that's how it was until 2000, when Tony Blair (who else?) changed the law to make postal votes available to anybody, on demand. By contrast, in the big county council elections in England last year, postal voting constituted an extraordinary 34 per cent of the overall turnout.

I'm imploring the Labour Government that until now might have benefited from mass postal voting to think again. Parliament needs to do something drastic to clear up the democratic system. If it doesn't, we can expect to read many more stories about dodgy voting practices.

Straight after the Manchester by-election I described the result as "a victory for sectarian voting and cheating". Is that really to be the future of British democracy?

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JAMES FRAYNE

A culture war with the Greens will only harm Reform

To win the next election, Farage's party must stay in the mainstream of British politics

If Reform politicians lose their heads and engage in a full-blown culture war with the Greens after the Gorton and Denton by-election, they will leave ordinary voters behind. This would drastically raise the odds of a hard-Left government after the next election. At all costs, Reform must stay in the mainstream of British politics.

The threat of a Left-wing governing coalition has been present for a while. Reform's national poll lead isn't enough to deliver a parliamentary majority. And while a Reform-led national government is still the most likely post-election outcome, this prospect often feels shaky.

Ongoing Conservative Party weakness suggests it will struggle to return more than a few dozen MPs. Election expert Sir John Curtice suggested the Tories' by-election performance last week was their worst ever. They secured less than 2 per cent of the vote, losing their deposit. Reform also never seem far away from implosion, with policy announcements regularly going awry and activists involved in offensive or stupid activity.

After Gorton and Denton, the prospect of a Left-wing coalition government – built by an assortment of parties and independents – is both more frightening and more real. More frightening, because the Green win will push centre parties further to the Left – desperate as they will be to appeal to angry swing voters deserting Labour. More real, because the Greens demonstrated a highly organised "ground game" in Gorton and Denton to turn out voters with Left-wing sympathies. Reform strategists have always thought tactical voting – a clear feature in this by-election – might one day affect them nationally.

There is also a danger that Reform will take the bait as the Greens lay into them, forgetting that it leads national polls precisely because it articulates mainstream concerns. The party risks being enticed into a culture war that the Greens need in order to thrive.

Critics suggest Reform operates on the darker fringes of politics – that its success reflects unpleasant populist tendencies among the white working class. This misses the point. Reform is popular because it is the only party apparently willing to do whatever it takes to deliver the basic functions of the state. Above all, it appears to be the only party to take border control seriously, and which wants tougher policing and sentencing.

To most of the public, decent policies on immigration and crime and justice are pretty much all that Reform offers. Its narrow focus is a problem that needs addressing fast with a broader policy platform – but it's a good place to start. These policies are not viewed as extreme or even divisive; the majority of voters agree with them.

Nigel Farage has always been a fundamentally mainstream politician – an old-school Thatcherite – and he is viewed that way by a massive chunk of the population. He is eccentric and he has occasionally pushed at the edges of decent political rhetoric, but he is cut from different cloth to many European populists on the Continent.

> It is popular because it is willing to do whatever it takes to deliver the basic functions of the state

But there's no denying Reform has more than its fair share of people who live just for the culture war. They are desperate to fight, first and foremost, multiculturalism and other forms of identity politics. They want to talk endlessly about free speech, trans rights, extremism in schools and university campuses, and so on.

The culture warriors aren't all wrong. Many of these issues – free speech, most obviously – are genuinely important and Reform should indeed fight them. But politics is about choices and you can't prioritise everything because target voters end up hearing nothing.

Reform must ruthlessly pursue the working class and lower-middle class of provincial England. These are Reform voters in Reform heartlands, and they don't prioritise the culture war like Reform activists imagine they do.

Of course, they would side with Reform over the Greens on these issues. Many of these voters sound off about things they see on TV and social media; they moan about people not wearing poppies, about stupid HR rules at work, and about political correctness in the public sector.

But these issues pale in comparison with practical concerns. Provincial voters in focus groups mainly want to discuss the cost of living and the NHS. They're furious with Labour for failing to deliver the improvements in these areas they promised. They have views on culture-war issues when asked – but they must be asked. Border control and crime and justice are different: these are practical issues that affect their daily lives. Immigration is something that many of the provincial English, even in quite large towns, are encountering for the first time. It was usually seen as a "big city" issue before.

However, every day Reform is talking about, for example, trans rights, is a day it's not talking about delivering the basic functions of the state. It's a day it will not be developing and articulating critical new policies on the cost of living, apprenticeships, adult retraining and high streets.

The danger is not that these voters would turn to hard-Left alternatives; rather, it's that they would conclude that no party cares about the things that affect their everyday lives. It risks them giving up on politics altogether. And in that case, they just won't vote. This is so dangerous because, as we saw in Gorton and Denton, the Greens and others will make sure their supporters definitely do turn out.

It is essential Reform stays in the mainstream of British politics. It must ignore provocation from the Greens, continue to talk about border control and crime and justice in sensible ways, and rapidly build a sound policy platform on other domestic issues.

The Greens are the extremists. Reform must prove it to the public.

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The Midlands town brought to its knees by Labour's jobs crisis

Redditch is being crippled by Rachel Reeves's policies, report *Szu Ping Chan* and *Eir Nolsøe*

MANUFACTURERS such as Pre-Met in Redditch, Worcestershire, have seen everything over the past century: wars, recessions and a pandemic.

The company, located just south of Birmingham, has roots tracing back to 1919.

Yet James Leng, Pre-Met's boss, who employs around 55 staff, questions how much longer enterprises such as his can survive.

"We've seen a dozen similar businesses to us in the past 18 months that have gone into administration in or around Redditch," he says.

Pre-Met churns out thousands of metal components that are shipped all over the world, ranging in size from a fingernail to an A5 sheet. Its products are used for the brakes in trains, cable strips in aeroplanes and the ends of fuses.

Redditch, a sleepy town of 80,000, used to make 90pc of the world's needles. Manufacturing is still its biggest strength.

But amid soaring energy and employment costs, industry is struggling. Leng now faces his toughest challenge yet to keep Pre-Met's doors open, thanks to sharp rises in the minimum wage and Rachel Reeves's £26bn tax raid on business.

His struggles are not uncommon in the area. Joblessness in Redditch has risen faster than anywhere else in Britain, climbing from 2.5pc just before Labour's landslide election victory to 5.6pc in the year to September 2025, above the national rate of just over 5pc.

Reeves will use Tuesday's Spring Statement to boast about early signs of economic growth and the prospect of more headroom – with which to balance the books. But there will be one theme Reeves will be reluctant to highlight: rising unemployment. Redditch is emblematic of a wider crisis across the UK. Nationally, almost 1.9 million people are out of a job. Some economists expect that figure to tip more than two million within months, surpassing pandemic highs.

Industrial towns such as Redditch should be thriving under Labour, but Leng is furious that the Government is crippling businesses similar to his. "The Government are sleepwalking into killing an industry and then wondering why they can't produce the most basic of metal components that go into the most basic products," he says.

"If it carries on the way it is, Redditch will continue to be the bellwether of rising unemployment."

'The hope is gone'

Until recently, Redditch had never been on the list of Britain's unemployment hot spots.

According to the latest census, just one in 40 people – or 2.7pc of its population – were unemployed in 2021, down from 4.3pc in 2011.

By all accounts, Redditch's residents are the very definition of the working people Labour pledged to fight for. But its economic fortunes have worsened, rather than improved, over the past two years.

Surging inflation has coincided with US tariffs, a cyber attack on Jaguar Land Rover affecting suppliers in the area and weak economic growth nationally.

The seeds of decline were arguably sown well before Labour came to power and many of the recent headwinds were out of ministers' control. But it remains a fact that the current Government has done little to improve its lot.

Redditch has a higher number of people in "skilled trades" compared with the national average, as well as sales and customer services and factory work.

This has exposed the town to the twin threats of overseas competition from places such as Eastern Europe and India, and to cost cutting by companies hurt by repeated tax raids and a higher minimum wage.

Walking through Redditch town centre, it is unclear what could replace the jobs lost in manufacturing.

Options are limited in a town whose population could fit inside a football stadium. Retail giants such as Debenhams and Marks and Spencer have closed in recent years.

Lorna Horton-Foster, a 31-year-old mother of three, says she has been applying far and wide for work in recent months.

"You don't even hear back. I can't commit to full time because of having to do the pick-ups and look after the kids around it. Companies are so strapped now with their money that they can't afford to take time and take risks with people," she says.

"A lot of places just want somebody who can come in straight away, do what they need you to do, without giving you any training. I've applied for cleaning jobs and they've said 'no' because I don't have previous cleaning job experience. Like, I clean the house."

Horton-Foster is desperate for work. Her husband works full time, but with three children they are forced to dip into savings every month.

She sees the same struggles among several of her friends in the area.

"For my generation, it's just never ending. Every day, you just wake up and it's just the same stuff again. There's no hope for it getting any better. Really, the hope is gone."

At the Old Needle Works Foundation in Redditch, which offers support to people who are struggling, they are also noticing the pressures. "More and more people are coming through the door who are unemployed. There's a mixture of people. There has been redundancies. [Some] people are also suffering with mental health issues and feel that they can't go back into work," says Louise Potter, the manager.

"We run a food bank here every Friday, so there's food for people to come and help themselves to. That's becoming busier and busier."

This sense of hopelessness is spreading, upending politics and killing the traditional Labour-Tory duopoly.

The Redditch constituency, created in 1997, has always been a marginal seat. Jacqui Smith, now Baroness Smith of Malvern, the former home secretary, held it for more than a decade before the Tories managed to wrest control in 2010. Labour took it back by just 800 votes in 2024, making it one of Britain's most marginal seats and a key target for Reform. If a vote were held today, Nigel Farage's party would win, with Labour in a distant third.

Hannah Spencer summed up the simmering feeling of discontent in places such as Redditch after pulling off an impressive victory for the Green Party in the Gorton and Denton by-election last week.

"Working hard used to get you something," she said in her victory speech. "It got you a house, a nice life, holidays. It got you somewhere. Now, working hard, where does that get you?" Horton-Foster echoes this sentiment: "Everybody is just trying to get to the point where you can at least afford the bills and everything you need. Any luxuries or enjoyment in life are just gone."

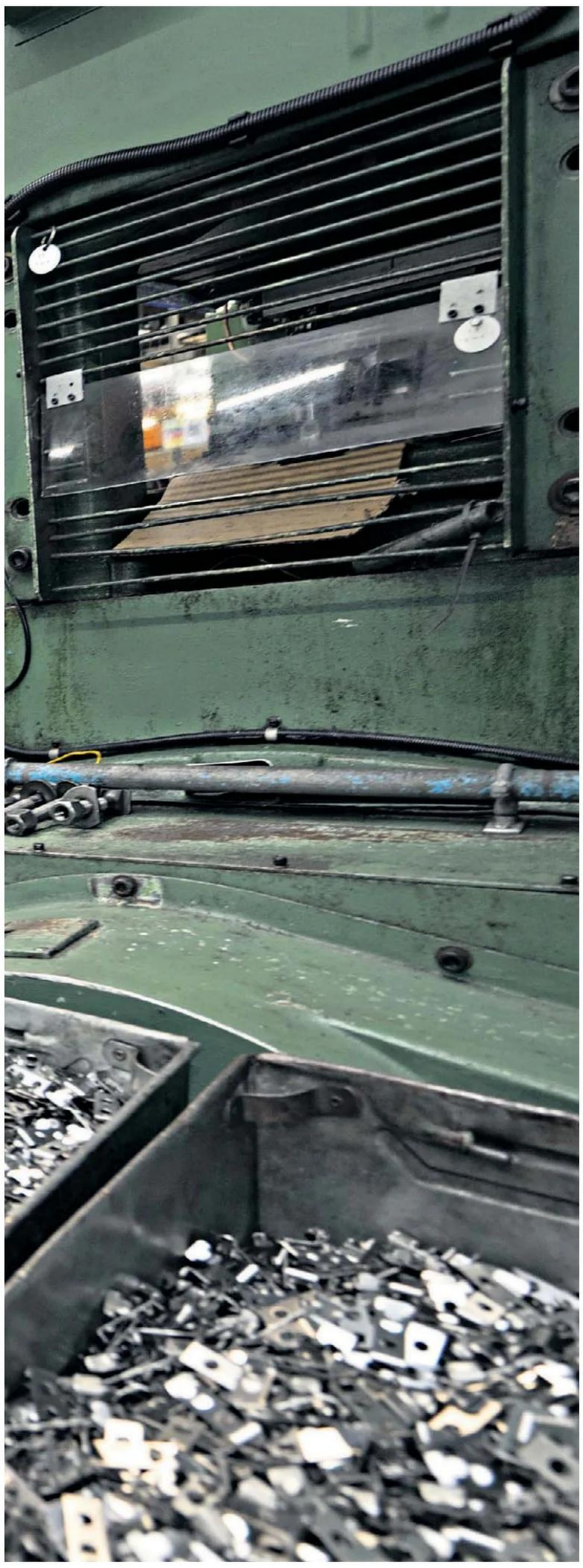
Britain's crippling unemployment crisis

Seven thousand applicants for just six jobs. One hundred miles south of Redditch, that is the daunting ratio facing newly qualified graduates applying for roles at one top firm in the City of London.

"It's difficult to tell whether these are all AI-enabled applications or a reflection of a loose labour market," says a senior manager responsible for sifting through the mound. "It's probably a bit of both."

While we are nowhere near the mass unemployment that spawned the "Labour isn't working" advertising campaign of the late 1970s – and inspired the English reggae band UB40, named after the attendance card issued to people claiming unemployment benefits – the jobs market is in a bad state and getting worse. At this week's Spring Statement, analysts at Barclays expect the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to revise its unemployment forecasts over the next four years.

The jobless rate is already around 100,000 higher than the OBR had expected and Jack Meaning, Barclays's chief UK economist, expects more "loosening" in the labour market – a euphemistic term for a continued fall in the number of jobs on offer. This has implications for the public finances. Back-of-the-envelope



James Leng, the boss of Pre-Met, left, says the only thing left to cut is staff; hopelessness is spreading in Redditch, above right; while the Employment Cafe, a recruitment company meeting space, is trying to help as many people as it can

DAVID ROSE FOR THE TELEGRAPH

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‘The national minimum wage is an ideology that I don’t support, because it’s artificially causing a problem’

calculations suggest that every 1pc fall in employment reduces income tax and National Insurance receipts by around £4bn – or roughly £10,000 per person.

Not only that, the OBR also says that every 100,000 rise in unemployment costs the taxpayer roughly £600m in extra welfare spending.

Even after the 2008 financial collapse, Britain’s job-rich recovery eased fears of a major crisis, although wages barely grew. In real terms workers are just over £1 better off than they were before the financial crisis.

After the pandemic, surging inactivity, mainly triggered by a rise in ill health, became the focus for policymakers.

But now, unemployment is back with a vengeance, particularly among young people, where the jobless rate is at its highest in a decade.

Retail and hospitality has recorded some of the steepest job losses, while IT graduates are already being replaced by AI.

CVs from desperate job seekers continue to pile up on Leng’s desk in Redditch. “The team are inundated with calls from recruiters trying to place people.”

He adds: “The CVs that come through will say the names of the businesses that they’ve been working in. I can guarantee you I’ll know most of them. I’ll know some of the directors, chief executives and owners of businesses around the corner from us that are making those redundancies.”

Leng has so far managed to avoid redundancies at his company. But he is certainly not hiring.

The business has faced a barrage of cost pressures since the Labour Government came into power, some the Chancellor was directly responsible for.

At her first Budget, Reeves raised the minimum wage by 6.7pc to £12.21 an hour from April 2025. This coincided with her raising employers’ National Insurance contributions to 15pc, from 13.8pc, and cutting the earnings threshold at which the tax applies.

As a result, the annual tax bill for the average minimum-wage worker jumped by 60.5pc.

“Our cost, directly as a result of that Budget, [went up] about £60,000 to £70,000 overnight. That’s the equivalent of employing two operators,” Leng says.

“So all of a sudden I’ve got to find savings of at least two people with no changes, because the customers won’t necessarily take the [price] increase. The supply chain below us are facing the same pressures, so they’re pushing their prices up.

“This year the further change in the minimum wage is going to cost us another £45,000. So that’s another person.”

The damage of Labour’s policies is clear.

The number of employees on the country’s payroll has fallen for 10 of the last 14 months. Before this, the figure had fallen in just seven of the past 113 months excluding the pandemic.

Many workers in Redditch are paid at or slightly above the national minimum wage. Hourly pay in the area averages £15.94 – one of the lowest rates in the country.

So while inflation-busting rises sting everywhere, in Redditch they deliver a hammer blow.

Steep minimum wage increases come on top of a litany of other costs: surging business rates, raw materials rising by 14pc in a year and utilities increasing by 7pc in the past eight months.

Meanwhile, tariffs and wider uncertainty mean an order book that used to offer certainty for at least a year ahead has been reduced to two or three months.

Foreign factories in Eastern Europe, Asia and in particular India and China remain eager to steal market share.

“None of those geographic regions have the mandated minimum employment protection,” Leng says

He adds: “They don’t suffer the same level of costs in utilities or business tax, and they are invariably more closely supported by their governments in investing in new machinery.

“That’s not to say that I’m in favour of not protecting labour. But it should be market-driven, not mandated by government. The national minimum wage is an ideology that I don’t necessarily support, because it’s artificially causing a problem.

“As a small business of 55 people that makes a huge difference as to how you can continue to invest.”

Employers are feeling the squeeze

Young people are at the sharp end of rising unemployment. Some 16.1pc of 16 to 24-year-olds are now out of work, the highest level in 11-years. Andy King, a former OBR official, has described it as a “self-inflicted” crisis.

Surging youth unemployment is giving ministers pause for thought. The Government pledged in its manifesto to pay young people the same minimum wage as older workers, effectively abolishing the youth rate that applies to 18 to 20-year-olds.

But ministers are now considering ditching that promise.

Government advisers are warning that giving 18-year-olds the same rate as people who are 25 will simply lock thousands more out of the jobs market.

“It’s absolute insanity,” says one. “When you’ve got a youth employment crisis, to push up wages where employers are already really reluctant to take on young people is just insanity. Why would we start with putting obstacles to getting that kind of experience?”

Business leaders have warned that minimum wage increases are making it too expensive for them to hire young people.

The policy has also prompted an intervention by Sir Tony Blair, the former prime minister, who warns in a new report that it is blighting the job prospects of a generation of young people.

“Set too high, a wage floor can erode the first rung on the career ladder,” the Tony Blair Institute warned.

Previous governments have already made a start on ending the gap between minimum pay for younger and older workers.

Sir Jeremy Hunt, chancellor at the time, reduced the age banding from 23 to 21 and presided over initial big increases in the wage floor.

However, he insists that it was meant to be a targeted intervention, not the start of a new trend.

“When we were in office, the rise in the minimum wage was part of a strategy to make work attractive following a rise in inactivity during the pandemic,” he says.

“But I was very clear it would be the last significant one for a while because of the risk to unemployment. What has happened since is nothing short of a tragedy.”

Now Reeves is expected to preside over an increase in the hourly rate for 18 to 20-year-olds from £10 to £10.85 in April, with under-18s and apprentices getting 45p more to £8 an hour. That comes on top of 16.3pc rise for 18 to 20-year-olds in 2024 authorised by Hunt.

Michael Wickens, at Cardiff Business School, blames government policy almost entirely for the recent increases in unemployment.

“Reduced demand due to higher taxes. Lower employment demand due to higher business taxes, higher labour taxes, higher minimum wage, higher energy costs, the disappearance of growth and the adoption of AI,” he says.

“On top of this, additional welfare support and the hangover from Covid has discouraged labour force participation. A perfect storm and it will get worse under this Government.”

There are also future challenges for the economy that will go unspoken on Tuesday, including the small matter of the Employment Rights Act, which employers and economists have already warned will make hiring even harder.

While the Act has already received Royal Assent, the OBR will not assess the economic impact of sweeping changes this week, though its impact poses a real risk to growth at a time when the labour market is already fragile.

Back in Redditch, council elections are looming. It is one of the areas where a controversial move to try to postpone them was overturned.

The area is Labour-controlled at the moment, but if the result of Gorton and Denton is anything to go by, it may not be for much longer.

Leng, at Pre-Met, says he has lost faith in all of the major political parties.

“I try not to be party [political], because I think they’re all a bunch of wasters, personally. The Tories oversaw carnage. Everyone hoped that Labour would be better. I think they’re just as bad, if not worse. Reform scare the living daylights out of me, if I’m honest.”

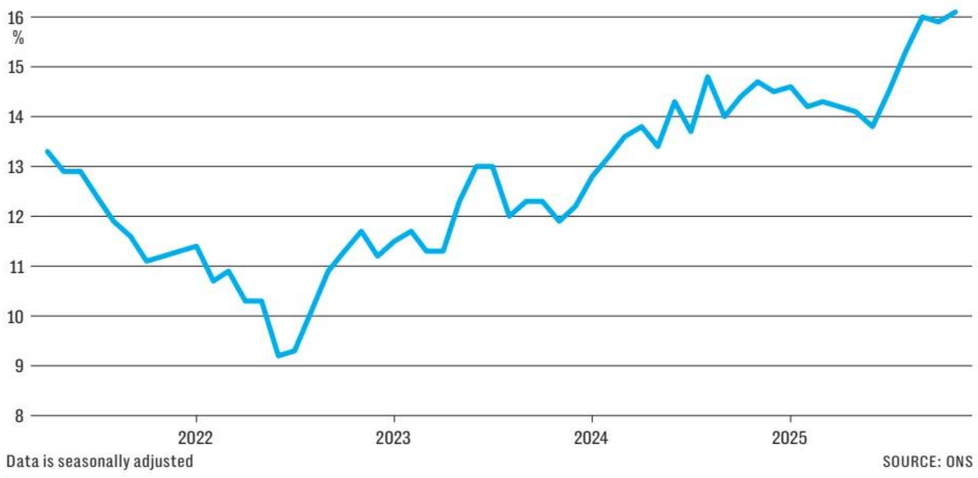
Rather than focus on elections, Leng is simply trying to make the numbers add up.

“We’ve done all of the work around the site, consolidation, getting rid of contracts or arrangements that aren’t cost-effective. We’ve renegotiated utility contracts as hard as we can to try to limit the increases there,” he says.

“We’ve cut everything that is surplus away from the business and out. Now there’s nothing else to cut other than people. That’s the brutal, honest truth.”

Youth unemployment is on the rise

Unemployment rate for 16 to 24-year-olds

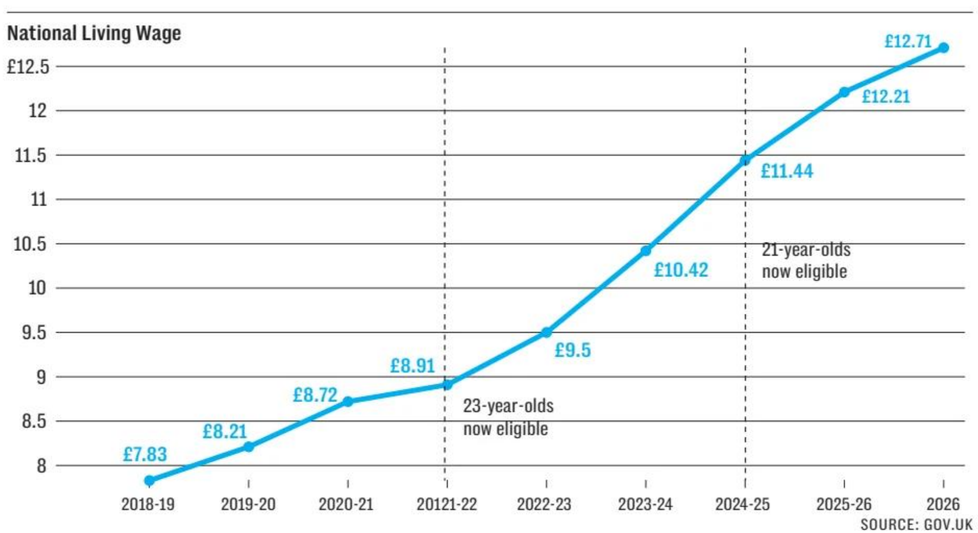


Data is seasonally adjusted

SOURCE: ONS

Inflation-busting minimum wage increases

National Living Wage



SOURCE: GOV.UK

The Sunday Interview

JULIAN SIMMONDS FOR THE TELEGRAPH

Robert Jenrick

‘Unlike the Tories, Reform aren’t constantly at each other’s throats’

After the Gorton and Denton by-election, the ‘shadow chancellor’ says Nigel Farage’s party is the only one that can stop a coalition of the Left. By *Annabel Denham*

Robert Jenrick and I speak just hours after news breaks that the Green Party has claimed a decisive victory in Gorton and Denton. Not unreasonably, he frames it as a victory of sorts for Reform, which more than doubled its vote share in what was, by every metric, the ultimate Labour stronghold. The Tories received less than 2 per cent of the vote, prompting Jenrick to repeat Reform’s well-worn refrain that they are the “only party of the centre-Right”.

This was no ordinary by-election; sectarian lines cut sharply through the south Manchester constituency. The Green campaign exploited this, distributing materials in Urdu urging Muslim voters to “punish Labour for Gaza”. Its candidate – now MP – Hannah Spencer was photographed wearing a keffiyeh and accused Reform of “Islamophobia” and racism, doubtless aware that roughly one fifth of the constituency’s population is of Pakistani heritage.

But Jenrick is most appalled by reports from accredited election observers alleging illegal “family voting”, which would represent a major breach of electoral law. “It’s a total disgrace,” he fumes. “Shameful, sad and shocking that men are instructing women how to cast their ballots. If we’re told this was prevalent in physical voting, you can only imagine what it was like with postal.” The Green Party, he reminds us, ran a campaign focused on a foreign conflict, under a foreign flag in, at times, a foreign language. Nigel Farage has levelled the accusation of “cheating”. Jenrick worries that it “make a mockery of our democratic process. It must be investigated fully.”

Few politicians have sounded the alarm over the failures of integration as tirelessly as Jenrick. As shadow justice secretary he recounted a visit to the Birmingham neighbourhood of Handsworth, lamenting that he hadn’t seen “another white face”. Cue a fit of the vapours from the British Left, but Jenrick stood by his words. “There are pockets of our big cities where people are living parallel lives, with completely failed integration,” he says now. “What better example of that is there than men telling women how to vote in an election?”

When I saw the Newark MP in mid-January, he had the look of a man who had been pushed before he was quite ready to jump. It was just days after he had been booted out of the Conservative Party and joined Reform, and we were at a rally in his constituency. The hall was packed, the mood upbeat – but Jenrick seemed slightly weary, as though still adjusting to the weight of a decision that would reshape his political life. He had been, by his own account, “90 per cent certain” at Christmas, when he was turning it over with his family. But it is the last 10 per cent that demands the real courage. Anyone can be almost sure.

This week, we met at Reform UK’s headquarters at Millbank, not in the warren of Parliamentary corridors where office space is decided by whips and MPs are placed alongside party colleagues. His Commons office on North Curtain Corridor is being boxed up – a further reminder that his political allegiance has irrevocably shifted. Jenrick arrives in a dark grey suit and forest-green knitted tie. He looks more energised than before, yet speaks cautiously, measuring each word, conscious perhaps that every sentence will be scrutinised for signs of apostasy or ambition.

Jenrick, who was widely described as “Nigel Farage’s ultimate prize”, joined the Conservatives at 16. He rose steadily, serving in the Treasury then later as housing secretary and immigration minister. For a time, he was derided as “Robert Generic”, his views seemingly sitting smack in the middle of the party’s broad church. This was the party he once hoped to lead, until he lost to Kemi Badenoch, securing 43.5 per cent of the members’ vote in 2024. Now he sits in Reform’s self-styled “shadow cabinet” as its economics spokesman – a role second only to Farage in influence and importance.

He seems, by instinct and by argument, an old-style conservative. He talks about tax cuts only when they can be afforded. He wants strong Armed Forces, controlled borders and a tougher approach to crime. He worries about integration and what he calls the balkanisation of British society. He wants to constrain judicial outreach and abolish the arbitrary net zero timetable he believes is harming industry. In 2024, he tells me, he wrote his own election leaflets and “barely mentioned the Conservative Party” with which, he says, he was already deeply disillusioned. They included an ambition to leave the European Convention on Human Rights, a stance since adopted by Kemi Badenoch.

This makes his departure feel in some ways unnecessary, though perfectly understandable. The Tories have always been capable of reinvention in order to win. Jenrick’s journey mirrors that adaptability, yet he has concluded, as have many others, that the chameleonic Conservatives cannot now change sufficiently to meet the challenges – and voter impatience – of today.

The past few weeks, he says, have required a “significant psychological adjustment”: “Former colleagues in Parliament, staff, activists in the constituency, friends, family – all have to come to terms with the decision. I knew it would be this way.”

It clearly hasn’t been easy. But, he feels, “time is a healer”.

Not everyone in his household was immediately persuaded. His wife of 17 years, Michal Berkner, had what he calls “mixed emotions”. The American corporate lawyer, who is eight years his senior, has been a part of the Newark community since Jenrick triumphed in the 2014 by-election. “She was cognisant of the very kind people in the Conservative Party who had welcomed her into their hearts,” he says. “It’s sad when friendships fray. But she has her own career and respects my decision.”

Their three daughters also had to reconcile themselves to the defection. His eldest, Marina, had “reservations”, he admits with a smile. The debate was not confined to the Jenrick breakfast table: it followed her to school, where her friends had their own opinions.

Though there is general resentment on the Conservative benches towards defectors, he believes he has been treated more harshly. He was a senior figure, more visible than others who have left, and an effective political operator many were relying on to help the Tories neutralise the Reform threat.

But it wasn’t a sudden move, he insists. “I became disillusioned over a number of years. I tried every effort to win arguments and push the party in the right direction.” The flashpoint, he says, was the party’s plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, which Rishi Sunak was convinced would deter further illegal migration. When he voted against what he saw as a “weak” bill, Sunak considered removing the whip.

“I was proven right,” says Jenrick. He believes Sunak called the general election early because he knew the Rwanda plan would fail over the summer in 2024, bringing more small boats and public embarrassment. It’s a bold claim, which captures the broader argument that the Tories, in office, promised what they were unwilling to deliver, shattering the trust and confidence of the public in the process. Reform has promised mass deportations, with a new UK Deportation Command that would “track down, detain and deport all illegal migrants”.

But, bearing in mind how many voters in Gorton and Denton supported a party that railed against Reform’s position on immigration, will it not be very difficult to deport large numbers of people from such places without massive civil unrest? “We’ve got no choice. It will require a tough approach but without it we won’t restore control to our borders.”

No sooner had Jenrick defected than he was handed the economics brief. The job of shadowing the chancellor is always the most highly prized within parties on the cusp of power; not only would the office-holder control the purse strings in the event of an election victory, but the job can be a useful stepping stone to the one above it.

Why him? “You’d have to ask Nigel,” he replies, coyly.

But Jenrick brings ministerial experience, including time in the Treasury, and a background in business before entering Parliament. He also brings some credibility with voters who might be tempted by Reform but remain wary of its inexperience and its earlier tendency to shoot policy from the hip.

There are, inevitably, going to be questions about tensions inside a fast-growing, insurgent party. Richard Tice, the former leader of Reform who graciously stepped aside when Farage returned in 2024, now serves as deputy and holds the expansive brief of business, trade and energy. Zia Yusuf, once chairman and head of policy, has been appointed home affairs spokesman. Both are thought to have coveted the “shadow chancellor” role.

Are we to believe there has been a rapprochement between Jenrick and Yusuf, who last summer exchanged barbs on X over immigration? Equally awkwardly, it was reported this week that, six months before his defection, Jenrick had asked a senior Conservative figure for negative material about Yusuf, remarking, “We should destroy him.” It exposes strains within a party well-supplied with ambitious individuals and still establishing its identity amid rapid growth.

“I’ve been incredibly impressed by both Zia and Richard,” Jenrick says carefully. And he rejects the idea Farage created the shadow cabinet (the first time Reform has had such a structure) to smooth over internal rivalries. “Zia and I speak multiple times a day. The atmosphere in Reform is like night and day compared with the Conservative Party. It’s extremely friendly, collegiate, with a real sense of energy and mission. And people actually seem to like one another.” That might be made easier by the fact that those, like Ben Habib and Rupert Lowe, who have fallen out with Farage have gone off in a huff.

Press Jenrick on the Yusuf contretemps and he shrugs. “If you can’t cope with a few punchy tweets you shouldn’t be in politics at all, let alone aspiring to be chancellor of the Exchequer. People are here not because it’s the route to social respectability, not for invitations to north London dinner parties.” A senior Reform figure offers more candour: “They used to hate each other. There was professional rivalry; Zia despises the Tories and constantly attacked Rob. But they met on the night Rob came over – Nigel arranged a dinner in Belgravia with all the Reform MPs – and hit it off straight away.”

In a recent speech, Jenrick described himself as a “reassuring revolutionary”, a piece of blarney designed to calm as much as to excite. He wants to take the best of the old – the reverence for fiscal prudence represented by his past as a Tory minister – and merge it with the new: reshaping the country’s approach to borders and welfare.

Already, however, Reform has been forced into uncomfortable reversals. On his first day as economics spokesman, Jenrick conceded that Nigel Farage had “drawn a line” under £90bn of promised tax cuts, a tacit admission that the sums did not add up. Reform must balance the demands of Red Wall voters for greater state intervention with the fiscal reality of constrained public finances. It’s a delicate balance. “People are clamouring for a government that will provide economic stability and be careful with their money. We’ve not had that in recent years. There’s no point in a Reform government if it just keeps things as they are.”

He invokes the phrase “fiscal responsibility” often, as though determined to attach it firmly onto the brand of a party that once pledged to pour billions more into the NHS money pit and part-nationalise the water industry. He is as scathing about Liz Truss as he is about Rachel Reeves – who he intends to hold to account as unforgivingly as he did David Lammy when he was Tory shadow justice secretary. Is Mel Stride, the Tories’ shadow chancellor, not doing just that, I ask. “I don’t think many people have heard of him.”

Like the majority of voters who tell pollsters that Labour is handling the economy poorly, Jenrick sees tax rises as choking growth and damaging employment. He speaks with particular concern about younger Britons. “I go around universities and I’m shocked by the number of people who don’t think there’s any future in this country,” laments Jenrick, who read history at St John’s College, Cambridge, graduating in 2003. “When I left university, there was a buzz and excitement.”

His answer is to build: roads, factories, data centres, railways, houses. He warns businesses that have relied on cheap foreign labour to prepare for change. “They should look at [our performance in] the polls,” he says. And this isn’t unpopular policies for thee but not me: in constituencies such as Newark, the major employers – such as distribution centres and food processing plants – are often dependent on overseas workers. Nor is he prepared to cut the minimum wage; he’s been in politics long enough to know it’s far easier to refuse a benefit than to remove one once granted.

On welfare, he is unequivocal. Reform, he informs me, is assembling what he calls the most comprehensive plan of any party to reduce the bill. Yusuf and Tice have identified £25bn of waste, though every incoming government promises to trim the fat and seldom finds as much as it expects. He won’t put a figure on how much a Reform administration could slash spending in a single Parliament, promising only “a lot”. Voters have heard similar claims before. This time, it will have to be different.

The two-child benefit cap is a case study in Reform’s growing pains. People forget that it was originally a Farage proposal – in 2014, while he was leading Ukip. Last year, Reform moved to scrap it, only to reverse course again, with Jenrick instrumental in the latest

> ‘Sensible, decent, patriotic people from the centre-Right have to be realistic about where we are today’

pivot. “Nigel is very rarely on the wrong side of issues,” he says. “I felt Reform had been on this one. We should be willing to admit our mistakes.” Jenrick echoes George Osborne’s sentiment, as expressed by the former chancellor in 2015, that “families in receipt of benefits [must] face the same financial choices about having children as those supporting themselves solely in work”. At the same time, he insists Britain must encourage higher birth rates. The means, he suggests, are good jobs, lower bills, cheaper housing and reduced taxes. It is an appealing picture, but it’s another one we have been promised in the past.

The triple lock for pensions may be the next internal battle. Jenrick says he has “always supported it”, yet Farage this week described it as “open for debate”. Jenrick reassures readers that pensioners’ dignity and security matter deeply to him. I suspect that this debate has not yet run its course.

On immigration policy, the Newark MP rejects the argument that our relaxed visa regime has delivered growth. He scoffs at the term “best and brightest”, and points to the US as an example of economic dynamism in an era of drastically reduced net migration. But critics note that America’s migration figures remain high and that demographic pressures in Britain are acute, with a shrinking worker-to-pensioner ratio and a fertility rate well below replacement level. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has just warned that Rachel Reeves would face a £30bn black hole in the public finances if net migration falls to zero.

But these may be quibbles. The bottom line is that Jenrick’s economic agenda involves a smaller state, lower taxes, less regulation, a focus on work and individual responsibility. Would he not describe himself as a Thatcherite? “She was right for her own times,” he says. “The situation today might seem similar, but the answers will be very different.” Jenrick argues that Reform represents a clean break from what he sees as the Conservative Party’s failures: Boris Johnson on immigration, Theresa May on net zero, and the eye-watering increase in welfare spending since the Tories came to power in 2010.

Perhaps. Yet there is an irony in watching two parties, so close in policy if not tone, circle each other with such overt hostility. Freud called it the narcissism of small differences. Their central point of consensus is surely the need to stop a Left-wing coalition entering government next time voters go to the polls. “I consider the problems facing this country serious and acute. But I’d be really scared for our future with Angela Rayner as prime minister, propped up by Zack Polanski’s Greens. Sensible, decent, patriotic people from the centre-Right have to be realistic about where we are today. We’re in a mess, it’s getting worse, and the crystallising choice is between Farage and a coalition of the Left.”

The key dividing line may lie less in policy than in credibility. “Kemi has as much chance of being the next prime minister as Polanski,” he says, with a flash of the combative edge with which we have recently become familiar. The Conservatives carry the weight of 14 years in government. Reform, though, carries the burden of being untested. Which is the greater disadvantage at a general election – if not a by-election – remains to be seen.

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Business & Money

Banking giant warns Reeves over exodus of entrepreneurs

Lombard Odier says its wealthy customers believe Labour is 'anti-business rather than pro-growth'

By **Luke Barr**

A LEADING private bank has warned the Government that high taxes and red tape are making Britain an "excruciating" place to invest and driving entrepreneurs overseas.

Lombard Odier, which manages money for the ultra-wealthy, has written to Rachel Reeves to highlight the scale of frustration among investors over the Government's policies.

The 230-year-old bank said the Chancellor's tax raid on employers' National Insurance contributions, combined with the Employment Rights Act and changes to business rates, had led many of its customers to conclude that the Government is "anti-business rather than pro-growth".

A number of high profile entrepreneurs have fled Britain for tax havens, including Dubai, in the wake of the Chancellor's Budget announcements.

Lombard Odier said the impact of the tax changes have been compounded by a "lack of enterprise and negativity embedded in UK investing culture".

"This cautious approach regarding investment may also be rooted in a perception that generating wealth is something negative," the bank wrote. It said some entrepreneurs "found the process of raising capital from UK investors excruciating", forcing many of them to seek investment overseas.

Lombard Odier submitted its concerns in a call for evidence launched by the Treasury last year. This was designed to tackle the growing number of entrepreneurs moving their companies overseas in search of growth.

Ms Reeves has tasked Treasury officials with reviewing the scale of investors leaving Britain. She has also launched an assessment of her decision to abolish the non-dom regime.

To tackle the wealth exodus, Mark Goddard, the UK chief executive of Lombard Odier, urged the Treasury to unlock £350bn from cash Isas to invest in start-ups. He also called for a dedicated investor visa contingent on investing in UK venture capital and private businesses. He said the Government should also focus on improving financial literacy to boost investment.

He added: "There needs to be a stronger promotion in the education system of financial literacy, investing and entrepreneurship, to support the next wave of businesses in the UK."

However, the Spring Statement on Tuesday is not expected to include tax breaks for business owners. Ms Reeves is aiming to keep it as uneventful as possible in an attempt to restore confidence.

Based in Switzerland, Lombard Odier launched in London more than 50 years ago and has built a business on managing money for start-up founders. It manages £215bn of client money globally.

Mr Goddard was invited to the Treasury for talks on the wealth exodus in February. To help inform the bank's letter to the Chancellor, Mr Goddard hosted a dinner with a group of eight entrepreneurs. Six of them said they would consider leaving the UK, Mr Goddard said.

"We are seeing a quiet but determined exodus," Mr Goddard said.

"When these individuals leave, they don't just take their bank balance. They take their expertise, their future tax contributions and their appetite to mentor and fund the next generation of British start-ups."

A Treasury spokesman said: "With £10tn of capital and a globally competitive tax regime – including the lowest main rate of capital gains tax in the European G7 and the doubling of tax reliefs for entrepreneurs – the UK remains an attractive place for talented individuals to live, invest and run a business."

THIBAUD MORITZ / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Having a Right laugh Marine Le Pen, president of France's Rassemblement National, shares a joke with the party's mayoral candidate for Toulon, Laure Lavalette. French voters will head to the polls for municipal elections on March 15 and 22.

One in three EV stations charging electric car drivers incorrectly

By **James Titcomb**

ELECTRIC car owners face being overcharged for recharging their vehicles, with one in three public charging stations providing incorrect readings.

Inspection company EVCI Global found that 31.5pc of chargers it tested were either overestimating or underestimating how much energy had been transferred to vehicles. It said the inaccuracies meant electric vehicle (EV) drivers were "exposed to higher financial risk" than owners of petrol cars.

After testing hundreds of chargers in Britain, EVCI Global found that 31.5pc were providing readings more than 2pc above or below the energy they were actually delivering to vehicles. Around 15pc of chargers were more than 5pc outside the true reading and a limited number had "materially larger deviations", it said in evidence provided to MPs on the transport select committee. Craig Marsden, the company's chief executive, said that in one case he had measured a charger providing 37pc less electricity than its reading claimed.

The discrepancies leave motorists already paying high public costs potentially being overcharged.

Public EV stations charge drivers for the energy they use at rates of up to 89p per kilowatt hour, meaning some heavy charging sessions can cost upwards of £70. An average driver relying exclusively on public charging can pay close to £2,000 a year and could be significantly overcharged if they use a station that repeatedly overestimates how much it has sent to a car.

Rising electricity prices have already sent the cost of running an electric car using public charge points beyond the equivalent cost of buying petrol with Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, also imposing a pay-per-mile tax from 2028.

The discrepancies involve chargers both underestimating and overestimating output, meaning that in some cases drivers will be billed less than they should. Petrol pumps are required by fuel dispenser regulations to be accurate within tolerances of 0.5pc to 1pc, with routine testing and inspection to make sure motorists are not overcharged. EV chargers are subject to much less strict requirements.

31.5pc

Proportion of chargers that were providing readings more than 2pc above or below the energy they were delivering

"This creates a two-tier system of consumer protection where EV drivers are currently exposed to significantly higher financial risk than drivers of combustion engine vehicles," EVCI Global said. The company has said chargers should be subject to a verification regime. It said it had spoken to government departments about the possibility.

"People with EVs need to know that they're getting what they're paying for, the same way that they do at petrol pumps," Mr Marsden said. It is unclear whether the chargers tested by EVCI Global are reflective of the more than 100,000 public chargers in Britain.

Industry body ChargeUK said inaccurate chargers were "isolated" cases. Jarrod Birch, its head of policy, said: "Charge point operators, auto manufacturers and drivers all care about accuracy but currently the evidence suggests isolated issues rather than a widespread problem. Electricity is different to fuel. It is harder to measure but charging an EV is also inherently more transparent than fuelling a petrol car."

He added: "The charging industry is engaging on this topic and does lots of testing and verification. We are open to determining if this is a more widespread issue and if so would welcome collaboration."

A Department for Transport spokesman said: "Public EV charge points are expected to accurately measure and provide the electricity they state they deliver. Meters used at most public charge points are covered by regulations requiring accuracy to within 2pc, which we expect all providers to adhere to."

John Lewis plots to buy back Waitrose stores

By **Luke Barr** *and* **Hannah Boland**

JOHN LEWIS is plotting to buy back some of its Waitrose supermarkets as part of a renewed push into retail.

Bosses are exploring the option of buying out landlords after building up a £1.5bn cash pile, confident that the company's turnaround is progressing.

It marks a significant change in John Lewis's fortunes after the company relied on its sale of a dozen Waitrose supermarkets in 2023 to raise £150m.

The strategy about-turn also sets John Lewis apart from some of its private equity-owned rivals in the retail sector. This includes Asda and Morrisons, which have raised billions of pounds in recent years by selling off chunks of their estate.

Retailers often use sale-and-lease-back schemes to secure an immediate cash injection, although it then burdens businesses with long-standing rental costs. It is not clear how many Waitrose supermarkets John Lewis wants to buy back, although a senior source said the business was taking an "opportunistic" approach.

There are more than 300 Waitrose stores across the UK, many of which are being upgraded as part of a £1bn investment programme. Including service station sites, airport shops and outposts in large John Lewis department stores, it has more than 400 Waitrose sites across the country.

John Lewis announced this month the acquisition of the freehold of the Hersham Green Shopping Centre in Surrey. The prospect of buying back more Waitrose supermarkets comes after John Lewis abandoned plans to build 10,000 homes last week.

John Lewis declined to comment.

Heathrow third runway 'to cost £1m a metre'

By **Christopher Jasper**

HEATHROW'S third runway will cost almost £1m a metre to build, according to estimates.

The cost for the landing strip – covering cement, asphalt and lights – will come in at £830,000 per metre, making it one of the most expensive runways ever built. The bill will be "a magnitude higher" than for runways at other major airports, 95pc of which have cost between £10,000 and £100,000 for every metre of length, according to a study into Heathrow's expenses obtained by *The Telegraph*. The price estimate from Oxford Global Project is for the 2.2-mile runway alone, meaning it could end up being much higher.

With the inclusion of earthworks, which create a stable foundation to build on, the cost rises to £2m per metre, and to £5m per metre once additional taxiways, the expanded airport apron and associated equipment are factored in, the report suggested.

Oxford Global said costs for Heathrow terminals, aircraft gates, baggage systems and car parks were also mostly in the top 10pc of airports worldwide. The study was commissioned by Heathrow Reimagined, which was formed by airlines including British Airways and Virgin Atlantic and is campaigning to lower charges at Heathrow and bring down the £33bn runway bill.

Oxford Global said the study revealed a "systematic pattern of elevated costs at Heathrow".

A Heathrow spokesman said: "The numbers in this so called 'independent analysis' simply do not reflect our plans. Heathrow expansion is a £33bn privately financed project with not a penny of taxpayers' money needed."

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Business comment

Matthew Lynn

It is time to cut the excessive duty on alcohol

SAVE OUR PUBS

Sky-high taxes are hammering the drinks and pubs industry and it is raising less money for the Treasury as a result

PERHAPS it should be renamed the "quaffer curve". The economist Arthur Laffer predicted that, above a certain level, higher taxes simply lead to lower revenues. His point has now been proven all over again in the British drinks industry.

Successive chancellors have pushed the duties on beer, wine and spirits to some of the highest levels in the world and – surprise, surprise – revenues are now falling. With pubs in crisis and the economy stagnant, the time has surely come to cut alcohol duty. It would cheer us all up, keep pubs open and raise more badly needed tax revenue.

For generations, increasing alcohol duties has been one of the easiest ways for hard-pressed chancellors to raise some extra cash. After all, we might cut back on many other things we spend money on if we are feeling squeezed for money. But most of us still like an occasional drink. Indeed, the worse things are, the more we might need a glass or two to cheer ourselves up.

Not any more. Figures from HMRC last week showed that overall alcohol duty receipts for the 2025-26 financial year have so far fallen by 4pc. In total, the levies raised £7.01bn – that's £285m less than a year ago – with declines witnessed right across the board.

Spirits faced the biggest drop, with a 7pc year-on-year decline, followed by beer with a 3pc fall. Only cider bucked the overall trend – seems the teenagers are still having fun – but otherwise revenues are sharply down. That is happening despite the duties hitting record levels.

Indeed, at the start of this month, the Government raised alcohol duties in line with the retail prices index, even though it is generally the higher of the measures of inflation. Duties go up and the amount the Government collects from the tax goes down.

Why would we be surprised about that? Britain now has some of the highest rates of taxes on drinking anywhere in the world. With the latest round of increase, we now have the steepest levies on wine – at least the full-strength variety – in the whole of Europe after overtaking Finland. The reason a glass of rosé by the Mediterranean is so surprisingly cheap is not just because it is local. The tax is far lower.

> 'Britain now has some of the highest rates of taxes on drinking anywhere in the world'

Likewise, our spirits taxes are some of the highest anywhere in the world. Indeed, a survey by the Scotch Whisky Association last year found that three quarters of distillers were planning to invest outside of the UK because the tax burden was so high. Brewers in Britain, meanwhile, are facing some of the highest rates of beer duty in Europe. Whichever way you care to look at, drinkers in this country are paying far more to the state on every pint, glass or shot than in almost any other country.

Sure, we all agree that heavy drinking should be discouraged. Alcoholism is a serious problem. The Treasury will regularly trot out the line that alcohol duties have to keep going up to stop us uncorking the second bottle of merlot halfway through the evening, or starting the day with a couple of stiff glasses of whisky.

The trouble is, that argument no longer really works. In general people are drinking less and less, and movements such as dry January have become increasingly popular. In reality, it has gone too far. The duties are now so high that they discourage responsible, moderate drinking, even though a glass of wine here and there is meant to be good for you.

There are three big problems with that. First, it is hammering our pubs. They were already closing at a rate of one a day in 2025 and this year that is estimated to have risen to four a day. Punishing business rates are one reason behind that and so is the increase in employment taxes. You cannot run a pub with no one behind the bar. But the increases in duties are also a major factor. Many people can't afford to go to the pub any more and if they do they are sticking to one pint instead of two.

Second, it is damaging a major British industry. Whisky has long been one of our largest exports, while the FTSE 100 is also home to some of the world's biggest drinks companies, such as Diageo, the owner of Johnnie Walker and Smirnoff. True, those are global industries and international companies, with products on sale in every bar in the world. But a vibrant industry depends crucially on a buoyant domestic market. We are kidding ourselves if we think we can remain a global leader in the alcohol industry while sales in Britain are relentlessly falling.

Finally, it isn't even raising extra money any more. The Treasury is constantly casting around for small, fiddly tax rises in a desperate attempt to keep the spending juggernaut on the road and balance the books for another year. And yet it is ignoring the simple point that one of its major taxes now has a declining yield.

Add it all up and the conclusion is surely clear. The time has come for a significant cut in alcohol duties. In fairness, Reform UK is already staking out that position, with Nigel Farage, its leader, setting out a plan to cut beer duty as part of a drive to rescue pubs. But we should go a lot further. The Chancellor should announce an across-the-board decrease in alcohol duties and pledge to carry on cutting rates until we are at average European levels. It would bring in more badly needed revenue for the Treasury. It might even make the most widely disliked Chancellor of recent times a little less unpopular.

Why things can only get worse without Starmer and Reeves

JEREMY WARNER
VIEWPOINT

Relative to Reform and Greens, the Chancellor may have something to commend her

SOMETIMES it makes sense to stay loyal to the centre ground, even in the face of electoral disaster, catastrophic misjudgment and increasingly loud noises-off from excitable political commentators.

And that's particularly the case for the economy, where constantly chopping and changing according to the diktats of the latest by-election or polling is bad for growth, undermines business and consumer confidence and is moreover quite unlikely to much improve the political fortunes of the beleaguered incumbents.

Besieged on all sides, Sir Keir Starmer is under intense pressure to cleave to the Left following Labour's damning showing in the Gorton and Denton by-election. By general agreement, he's once again been shown as lacking in political nous and judgment. Perhaps he's finally finished, I don't know. That's what most political experts say. But in gleefully writing his obituary, people should be careful what they wish for.

Starmer should have swallowed his pride, many Labourites say, and let Andy Burnham, who as Manchester Mayor luxuriates in the sobriquet of "King of the North", have a go at Gorton and Denton. Burnham might well have saved Labour's embarrassment at being hammered into third place. But had he won, he would also no doubt have consolidated the Leftwards lurch at Westminster.

Rather than the seemingly ineffectual Sir Keir, the future of the country would instead have been handed to Burnham, Angela Rayner, Ed Miliband or some such other Left-leaning mascot.

That's political evolution for you, I suppose, but it is not what gave Labour its overwhelming majority, and it is about the last thing the country needs.

Do Rayner and her backers genuinely think that a "braver Labour", by which is presumably meant an approach that further shreds manifesto promises of a dependable centrist government, is going to help?

Such is the scale of public discontent that it will only compound the loss of trust as well as further trash the economy. People lent their votes to Labour because they thought of Sir Keir as a safe pair of hands – a kind of uncharismatic version of Tony Blair at the height of his powers.

Insofar as it is ever possible to assign a single cause to the outcome of a general election, this is broadly what people thought they were voting for – an end to the political uncertainty and instability that has blighted these shores ever since the Brexit referendum of nearly 10 years ago.

The UK cries out for settled government and predictable policy, yet answer comes there none. Instead we have a continuation of the chaos that defined previous Conservative governments. It was the promise of stability that helped Labour secure its landslide election victory little more than a year and a half ago, but it has all turned to dust. Since then, Downing Street has made countless errors, both politically and economically – no doubt about that. From pensioners, to families and benefit recipients alike, fights have been picked with core Labour constituencies.

JEREMY SELWYN/EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES

Some thought that the future of the country should have been handed to the Left-leaning Andy Burnham or Angela Rayner

The Government has also managed to alienate much of the Muslim vote with its all-over-the-place, neither-fish-nor-foul stance on Gaza.

Economic management has been equally inept. By what logic is the threatened jobs apocalypse of artificial intelligence addressed by substantially increasing labour market taxes and regulation? There could scarcely have been a worse approach. But nor do the siren calls of Left and Right make any sense either. Neither of them has any convincing answer as to how their all-things-to-all-men list of promises would be paid for. In both cases the prospectus is an entirely false one.

The same charge, it should be said, can be made against Rachel Reeves as she prepares for next Tuesday's Spring Statement. She came to power proposing only minor tax rises, which though intensely irritating to those affected, were at least pre-announced and could have been quite easily absorbed. In the event, she has managed to raise taxes by a whopping great £70bn, substantially through increased employers' National Insurance contributions and the "fiscal drag" of frozen tax thresholds. At around 2pc of gross domestic product, this is one of the largest such tax grabs ever. This was never in the prospectus, and won't be lightly forgiven.

> 'In gleefully writing Starmer's obituary, people should be careful what they wish for'

In any case, its messaging of a Government that cannot be trusted was no doubt a contributory factor in Thursday by-election drubbing. All the same, there is a sense of the corner having been finally turned.

Reeves has been desperately trying to downplay the significance of next week's Spring Statement, and would dearly like it to be seen as a non-event.

So much so that at one point she was reportedly thinking of delegating its delivery to one of her juniors.

With the economy showing signs of some sort of cyclical rebound, the last thing she wants to be doing is further adjusting policy to meet the disciplines of her own self-imposed fiscal rules.

Nor on the face of it does she need to. In her last Budget, she announced that performance against the fiscal rules would in future be assessed by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) once a year in the autumn, relegating the Spring Statement to a mere "update on the economy and the public finances" with no significant policy changes. But even if she hadn't abandoned the once biannual assessment, substantive changes in tax and spend would in all probability have seemed unnecessary.

There are, however, three rather big flies in the ointment: much lower immigration, rising unemployment and the slightly curious OBR assumption that future growth will be somewhat tax richer than in the past.

From a fiscal perspective, falling immigration is the more serious of these threats to the outlook.There are two routes to economic growth. One is an expanding labour force, which immigration plainly helps feed; the other is improved productivity.

Already, migration is in some respects yesterday's story. Tighter controls have already reduced it to below the OBR's central assumption. Some commentators see it falling as far as net zero in the years ahead for the first time since the early 1990s.

This would have major negative implications for the OBR's fiscal forecasts unless compensated for by a significant rise in productivity. OBR assumptions on employment, and the supposedly more tax-rich nature of future growth, also seem questionable.

But these are problems for the future, and for now the economic and fiscal outlook is beginning to seem more settled and positive than it was, certainly compared to major peers.

Reeves herself promises no more nasties. Assuming she keeps her job, there is some reason to believe her. Policy certainty and political stability are not in themselves any guarantee of economic growth, but they are at least a start. It is not by saying much, but relative to the alternatives, Starmer and Reeves may actually have something to commend them.

The tide is turning on ludicrous net zero policies

LIAM HALLIGAN
ECONOMIC AGENDA

The UK's self-flagellating, virtue-signalling nonsense over North Sea drilling has come at too high a price

BRENT crude last week moved above $70 a barrel, having risen more than 20pc since mid-December. This is partly due to ongoing geopolitical tensions – not least the danger of imminent conflict between the US and Iran, which has now gone from risk to reality.

Iran pumps over four million barrels per day, close to 5pc of global crude output. Any US attack could impact that supply – one reason oil prices are now at a seven-month high.

It's fashionable to argue fossil fuels no longer matter to the global economy – or soon won't. In reality, this is nonsense. Back in 1973, when the Israel-Egypt Yom Kippur war sparked the Arab oil embargo, causing major problems for big Western energy importers, the world economy used 55 million barrels of oil per day. Last year, that figure was 105 million, almost double. Oil is still vital across a range of sectors, not just energy and transport, but petrochemicals, lubricants and the manufacture of all kinds of polymers and plastics.

Fossil fuels still account for some 70pc of the UK's primary energy production. Even if ultra-optimistic official "net zero" targets for renewable energy are met, oil and gas will continue to be vital for decades to come. You wouldn't think it, given how successive governments have regulated and taxed North Sea production almost into oblivion.

Back in 1999, the UK's combined oil and gas output peaked at 4.6 million barrels of oil equivalent (boe) per day, a hefty 3pc of global production. As the basin naturally declined, production fell to 2.6m boe daily in 2008, then 1.7m a decade later. But output cratered after the Tories introduced the energy profits levy (EPL) in 2022, responding to a temporary spike in oil and gas prices after Russia invaded Ukraine.

The EPL initially meant North Sea producers faced a 65pc tax rate, subsequently raised to an extremely punishing 78pc. Labour has since extended the EPL from 2028 to 2030, while imposing a ban on new North Sea drilling licences. Within a year of the EPL being introduced, UK oil and gas production had dropped to 1.1m boe per day, with industry estimated plunging further to 780,000 by 2027 and 650,000 by the end of this decade.

As pulverising taxation and a drilling ban have hammered North Sea production and investment, related tax revenues have also plunged – from £9.9bn in 2022, when the EPL started, to £5.4bn the following year and £4.5bn in 2024/25. During this financial year, 2025/26, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates just £2.7bn of North Sea revenues.

And just as billions of pounds in much-needed government revenue has been sacrificed on the "net zero" altar, so have jobs. Ten years ago, the UK's oil and gas complex employed some 400,000 workers, often in well-paid jobs held overwhelmingly by men from post-industrial areas of the Midlands,north of England and Scotland. Today, Britain's oil and gas workforce is barely a quarter of that – one reason trade unions are often highly sceptical of "net zero" and promises of "well-paid green jobs".

Louise Gilmour, Scotland secretary of the UK's third-largest GMB union, last month said "delusional" net zero policies championed by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband are causing "arguably the most destructive industrial calamity in our nation's history". The detrimental industrial impact of "net zero" goes well beyond the energy sector, of course – with countless car factories and other manufacturing centres closing over recent years. In each case, owners, unions and analysts have cited the damage done by energy prices and regulations connected with the green initiatives of both Conservative and Labour governments. We're now in the midst of a mood shift – and not a moment too soon. Last spring, Tory leader Kemi Badenoch declared that, even though a Tory government enshrined the UK's "net zero 2050 emissions target" into law, her party was now declaring that target to be "impossible". Shocking to countless bien pensant MPs, including plenty of Tories, Badenoch's move was courageous, and shifted the political dial. Since then, concerns about a blind adherence to "net zero" have been much more widely and openly expressed – and rightly so.

> 'It's fashionable to argue fossil fuels no longer matter to the global economy'

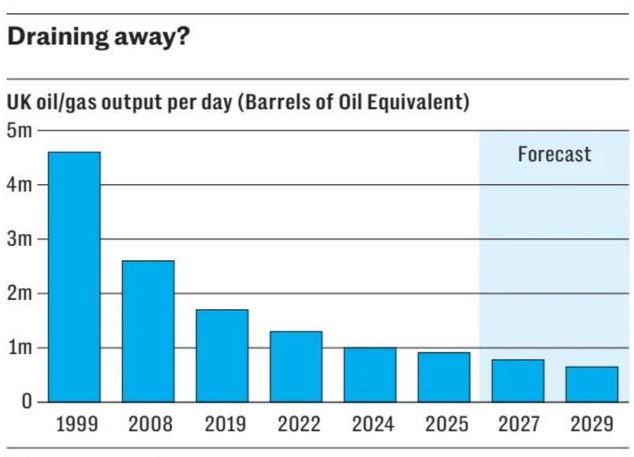
In the face of plunging North Sea production, the UK is importing huge amounts of liquified natural gas from Qatar and America. Converting LNG into and out of its liquid form generates a lot of carbon emissions, as does shipping it in diesel-powered ships – far more than drilling our own energy. Relying on imports also means the UK misses out on billions of pounds of tax revenues and countless jobs. But at least Miliband can boast at international conferences that Britain is hitting our net zero targets. The UK's North Sea policies are simply ludicrous. Just beyond our waters, Norway is accelerating its oil and gas output, reopening "dead" fields, and licensing new areas to maintain high production. Denmark is preparing to extend drilling to 2050. What a contrast with Britain's self-flagellating, virtue-signalling nonsense.

Rumours are swirling that Rachel Reeves, in this week's Spring Statement, may water down the EPL, in a bid to kickstart oil and gas production. Yet Sir Keir Starmer may be too weak to let that happen.

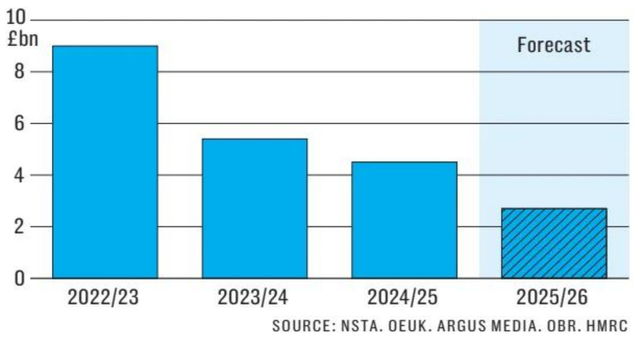
It is Labour MPs and activists who are masters of Starmer's fate, who can remove him and appoint a successor.

And it may be that, with the Labour Left on the rampage, Downing Street's plans to temper the damaging EPL on North Sea producers are watered down to the point of non-existence.

Draining away?



Revenue rout



SOURCE: NSTA. OEUK. ARGUS MEDIA. OBR. HMRC

‘I was wrongly vilified for summer travel chaos’

NATS boss Martin Rolfe was public enemy number one for several days in 2023. By *Christopher Jasper*

BRITAIN’S air traffic control chief claims he was wrongly persecuted for his role in one of the country’s biggest flight delay disasters.

Martin Rolfe, who became public enemy number one for several days in the summer of 2023 after a crippling outage at National Air Traffic Services (NATS), said the invasion of his family’s privacy during the chaos was “entirely unacceptable”.

Rolfe, the chief executive of the air traffic control company, claimed he was vilified on social media following the IT meltdown, which disrupted flights for 700,000 people over the August bank holiday weekend and cost airlines £65m. The mass groundings sparked criticism over his £1.3m bonus, with Rolfe having seen photographers descend on his Hampshire home. More than two and a half years on, the hostile reaction to the 2023 outage still rankles.

Rolfe, 53, said that while the personalisation of the meltdown was inevitable, it was unacceptable for his family to get caught up in the storm.

“Society has become intolerant of anything failing,” he said. “It’s that sort of internet-age thing. It’s on Facebook in 10 seconds.

“Where you’re doing something which is of national interest you know there is a reasonable chance it could happen. It doesn’t really matter if it’s fair. But do I think it’s reasonable that people come and take photographs of my house and my children? Of course not. I do a job and I think I do it reasonably well. And we were giving interviews. It wasn’t like I was refusing to speak.”

It was not just passengers who were attacking Rolfe during the crisis. At the time, an inquiry found that on-call staff had failed to respond to the incident, triggered after faulty data relating to a single flight caused the system to freeze. It prompted Michael O’Leary, the boss of Ryanair, to label Rolfe incompetent and say he should resign.

The Irishman, who claimed Rolfe’s work-from-home policy allowed engineers to sit “watching *Football Focus* in their jim-jams”, has since repeated the call on numerous occasions, with easyJet and British Airways joining in with the criticism.

Rolfe said that while he accepts the blame for the meltdown, it should have been viewed in the context of NATS’s success in delivering “10 times better safety and 10 times better capacity and delay performance” since it was privatised in 2001.

He said: “I think we’ve had four incidents in 12 years, each of which has lasted less than a day. What would be good enough? Is it one incident in a hundred years and if so would you want to pay 10 times as much for your ticket? I think probably not.”

Rolfe said that “these things happen”, adding: “What we try to do is absolutely minimise them and then recover as quickly as possible. But [we] will always take the right action even if that means people not getting to their destination. Somebody once said to me you would far rather be on the ground wishing you were in the air than in the air wishing you were on the ground. I think that’s a pretty good mantra.”

As for the Ryanair supremo, Rolfe said their encounters have been few and far between.

“I saw him a few months ago,” he said. “We said ‘hi’ from a distance. We have a sort of professional relationship.

“I wouldn’t say we go out for a cup of tea or anything. If you’re running an airline and you’ve got passengers screaming at you and it’s not your fault you probably say, look, it’s their fault over there. I can’t really blame them for that. But I think the majority of airlines are pretty happy with our service. There is a camaraderie there, not everywhere, but for the most part.

One of the airline CEOs emailed saying, ‘feeling for you, if you want to have a chat anytime give me a shout’.”

Resignation, he said, was never an option: “If you are leading an organisation you have to lead it through the hard stuff.” Having ridden out the crisis and survived a grilling from Heidi Alexander, the Transport Secretary, over a smaller radar-related outage last July, Rolfe is poised to court controversy again as NATS embarks on a sweeping revamp of UK airspace. The initiative will seek to modernise a system devised in the 1950s, when flights totalled 200,000 a year, less than a tenth of the number today.

While the remapping of flight paths and runway approaches will help to accommodate hundreds of thousands more services from new runways at Heathrow and Gatwick, it will expose hitherto quiet areas to aircraft noise.

Rolfe said: “All the routes will be redesigned and you’re changing where you fly over the ground, which is one

‘Society has become intolerant of anything failing. It’s that sort of internet-age thing’

of the biggest reasons it has been so difficult to do over the years. But with the new runways it cannot be avoided.

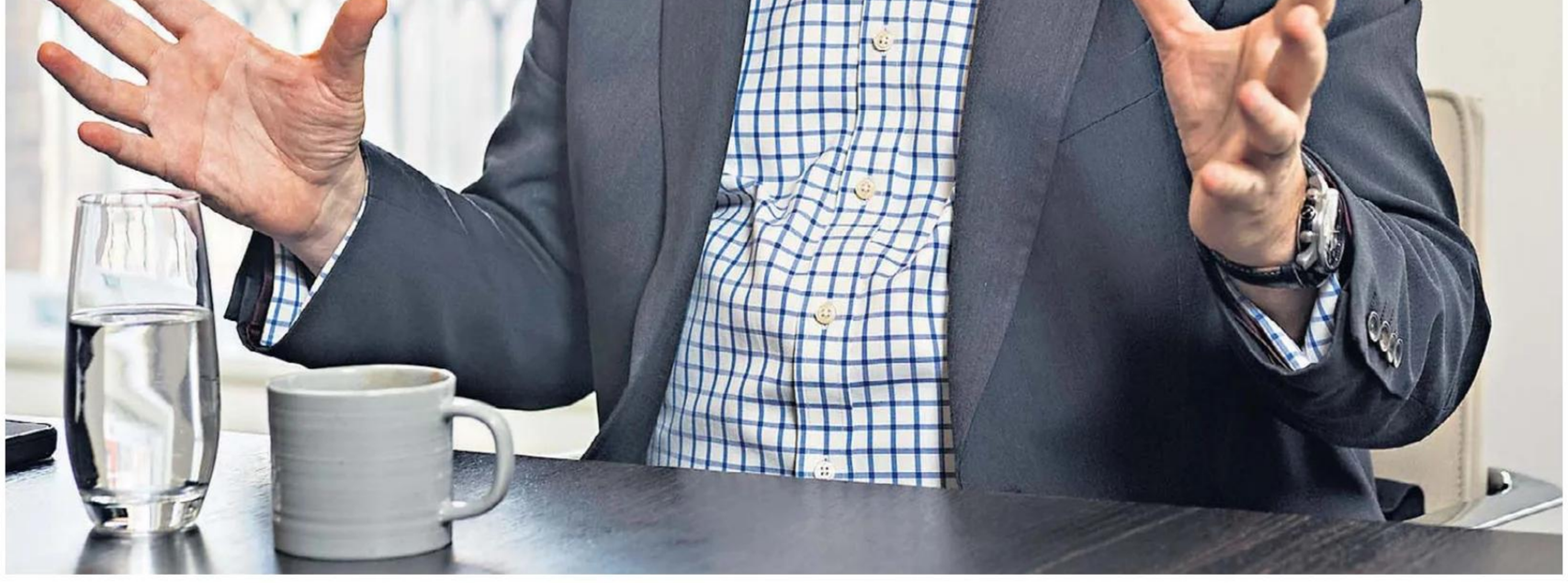
“There have been some changes in the last 15 years but the majority have not been over the South East where you’ve got the biggest population and changing it is most challenging.” More positively, he said, aircraft will be able to fly shorter routes, reducing flight times, easing the workload for pilots and cutting carbon emissions by 6pc.

AI is expected to play an increasing role in air traffic control. It is already used to assess the aptitude of people for the job and in roles such as interfacing with runway cameras to monitor aircraft as they touch down with more accuracy than a human.

NATS is working with the Alan Turing Institute on an AI air traffic controller dubbed a “buddy” that will one day work alongside staff, presenting flight options and making recommendations.

However, Rolfe said he is wary about affording the technology too much power. “AI holds a lot of promise but unlike some sectors we will be careful about how we apply it.

“Having a human in the loop is important, particularly as there is going to be a human in the cockpit for a long while to come.”



JEFF GILBERT

Martin Rolfe said it was wrong for his family to get caught up in the media storm in 2023 after an outage caused travel chaos, below

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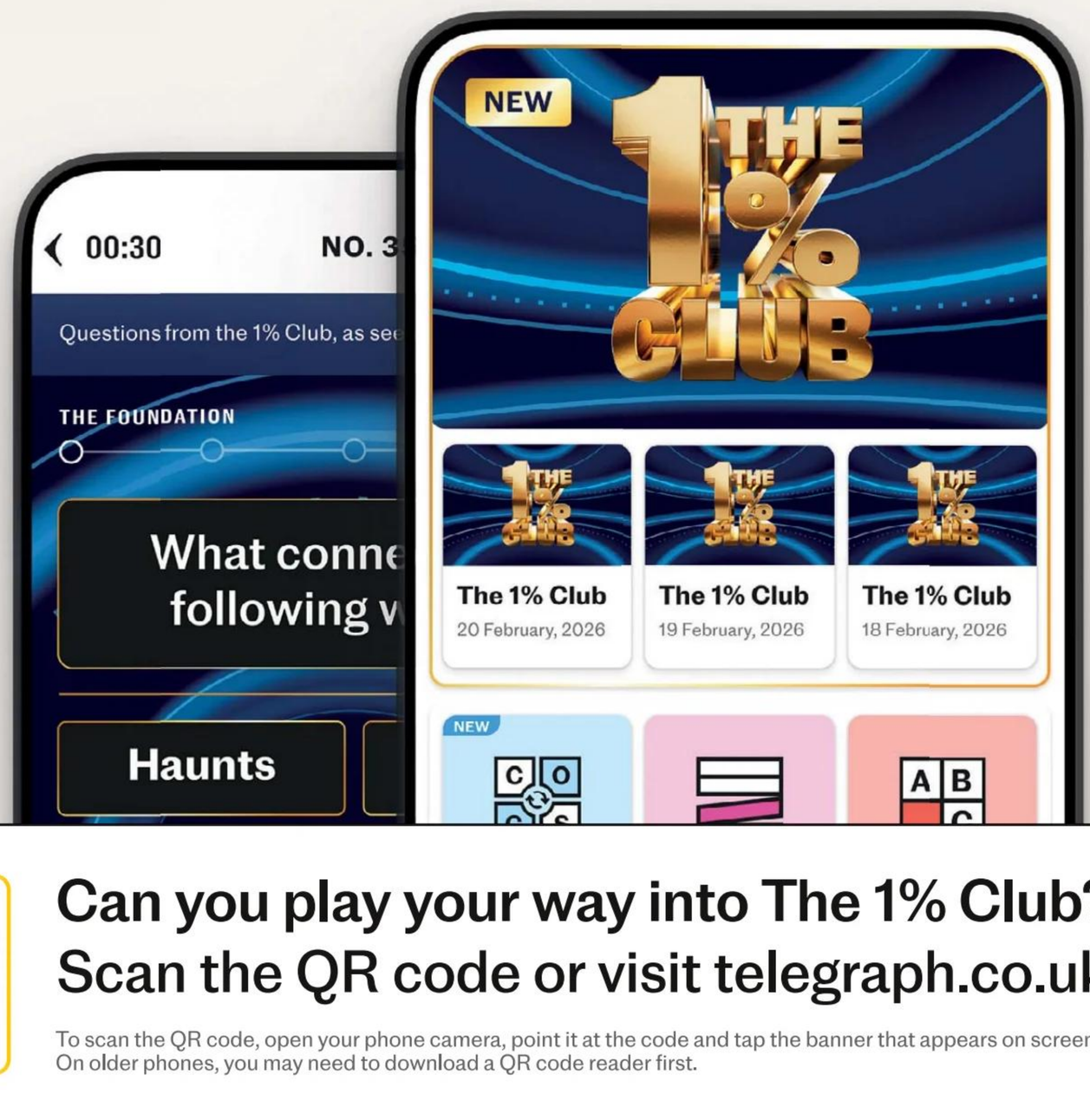

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The student loans crisis hollowing out university towns

Vacancy rates are rising as undergraduates choose to stay at home to study, finds *Pui-Guan Man*

ON A quiet road in the heart of Nottingham sits a tower block with hundreds of gleaming student flats, each starting at £200 per week.

Peer through the glass windows on the ground floor and you will see an airy lobby, rows of retro-style arcade machines and a basketball hoop.

Paces away is another building with hundreds more flats above amenities, including a sprawling gym, cinema, gaming dens and studio rooms. Prices start from £170 per week.

Both are examples of purpose-built student accommodation that have been built in the university city. Some 20 blocks have been constructed within the past two years, pitched as slick lifestyle choices for domestic and international students alike.

The mantra of developers may have been: "If you build it, they will come". But there's a problem: increasingly, students are not.

This week, more than £300m was wiped off the value of Unite Group, Britain's biggest student housing provider, after it warned of weaker international student numbers and a trend for more students choosing to stay at home while they study.

Unite said vacancies were "concentrated" in places such as Nottingham, Sheffield and Leicester.

Vacancy rates across all of Nottingham's purpose-built student blocks hit 11.2pc for the 2024-25 academic year, according to a 2025 survey by the Labour-run city council.

That is nearly three times higher than the rate recorded in the previous year, when it stood at 3.5pc, and far weaker than the sub-1pc levels that prevailed for much of the previous decade.

Vacancy rates are climbing rapidly as cost of living pressures, the increasing burden of student loans and stricter visa policies start to bite.

Council researchers warn it is becoming "increasingly unlikely" that students will fill the hundreds of rooms under construction and already built in the city. One manager of a newly built block, who did not wish to be named, says the purpose-built student housing market is "oversaturated". He adds: "[The council] says there are too many, but they keep approving them."

Nottingham is a vivid example of student housing oversupply, but it is not the only English city that risks being overrun with swathes of empty student tower blocks.

Similar dynamics are playing out across Leeds, Sheffield and a string of other cities where property developers and councils have spent the past decade betting that the pipeline of students would not run dry. It was a reasonable wager for several years, with growing student numbers and international applications. Meanwhile, the stability and dependability of student rents lured investors in their droves. Nearly £50bn has been poured into student development projects in the UK over the past decade, according to Knight Frank. But now, those bets are being called, as student loans increasingly weigh on affordability.

"In the past couple of years, how students want to attend university and the number of them going to university has changed," says Paul Seddon, the director of planning and transport at Nottingham city council.

"Nottingham and other universities in England have experienced a significant drop in international students, [along] with the cost of living crisis and students wondering whether a significant expense is part of what they want."

A record 24.4pc of average rents for student accommodation in England were above the maximum student maintenance loan – which is designed to cover living costs – in 2025-26, according to Cushman & Wakefield, the property consultancy. The figure was just 5.3pc in 2016-17.

Amira Campbell, the president of the National Union of Students, says: "Maintenance grants should cover rent, bills and essentials, at the very least. But right now, they simply don't."

As a result, more students are switching to cheaper halls or commuting from home, rather than renting rooms or flats, to cope with the spiralling cost of living and avoid burgeoning debt.

The proportion of full-time students at Nottingham's two universities who live either at home or outside the city rose from 14pc in 2022-23 to 19pc in 2024-25. Unique James, a 23-year-old student at Nottingham Trent, rented a flat during her first year of studies for £180 per week, but describes it as something she would "never do again".

She says: "It was very stressful. I took out a loan, but it just paid for my rent. When I got a part-time job, it was better, but it was still very expensive for me."

James has since moved to a house shared with others where she pays £125 per week, which she says has made "such a big difference".

David Feeney, of Cushman & Wakefield, says: "There's an affordability crunch for a lot of UK students. Over the past three or four years, we've seen rental growth of 10pc-plus from some providers, so students who could choose to commute for an hour and a half a day are definitely making value-for-money judgments in a few of these markets, and some of them are choosing to stay at home."

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (Ucas) data show that the number of 18-year-olds planning to live at home while studying in the UK reached a record high of 89,510 in December, up 7pc on the previous year.

Dan Lonsdale, 23, commutes to Newcastle from Durham for his postgraduate studies. Despite taking out a loan, he says it is "terrifying how quickly the money melts away".

He is factoring future debt repayments into his financial decisions, a situation that he finds "frustrating". Including borrowings for his undergraduate course, the total he owes so far amounts to £62,552. "It is a tax on social mobility, there's no two ways around it," he says.

> 'How students want to attend university and the number of them going to university has changed'

Millions of students who started their courses between 2012 and 2023 repay 9pc of everything they earn above a threshold of £28,470, rising to £29,385 in April, plus interest.

Rachel Reeves's move to freeze repayment thresholds until 2030 in last year's autumn Budget means a graduate who started university in 2022 will repay around £3,000 more over the lifetime of their loan, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Tim Leckie, an analyst at Panmure Liberum, says the structure for loan repayments is eroding the incentive for students to go to university – sparking doubts over what the future holds for private student accommodation.

"Behind this is a complete overhaul of the economic incentive structure for higher education in the UK, as the Government has shifted more of the cost to the student."

Leckie adds that more people are now considering whether a degree offers enough value in today's economic climate. "The threshold they start paying at is coming down, while the alternative, non-university employment with minimum wage, has got 34pc better. And the graduate market is very uncertain."

Compounding the domestic pressures is a collapse in international student numbers – a key demographic for private accommodation – that the property sector is struggling to absorb, after visa rules tightened in 2024.

The latest Home Office figures indicate that applicants for sponsored study visas dropped by 31pc in January year on year. Labour's immigration White Paper proposes more barriers, including a 6pc levy on international fees and a reduction in the post-study visa from two years to 18 months.

> 'Grants should cover rent, bills and essentials, at the very least. But right now, they simply don't'

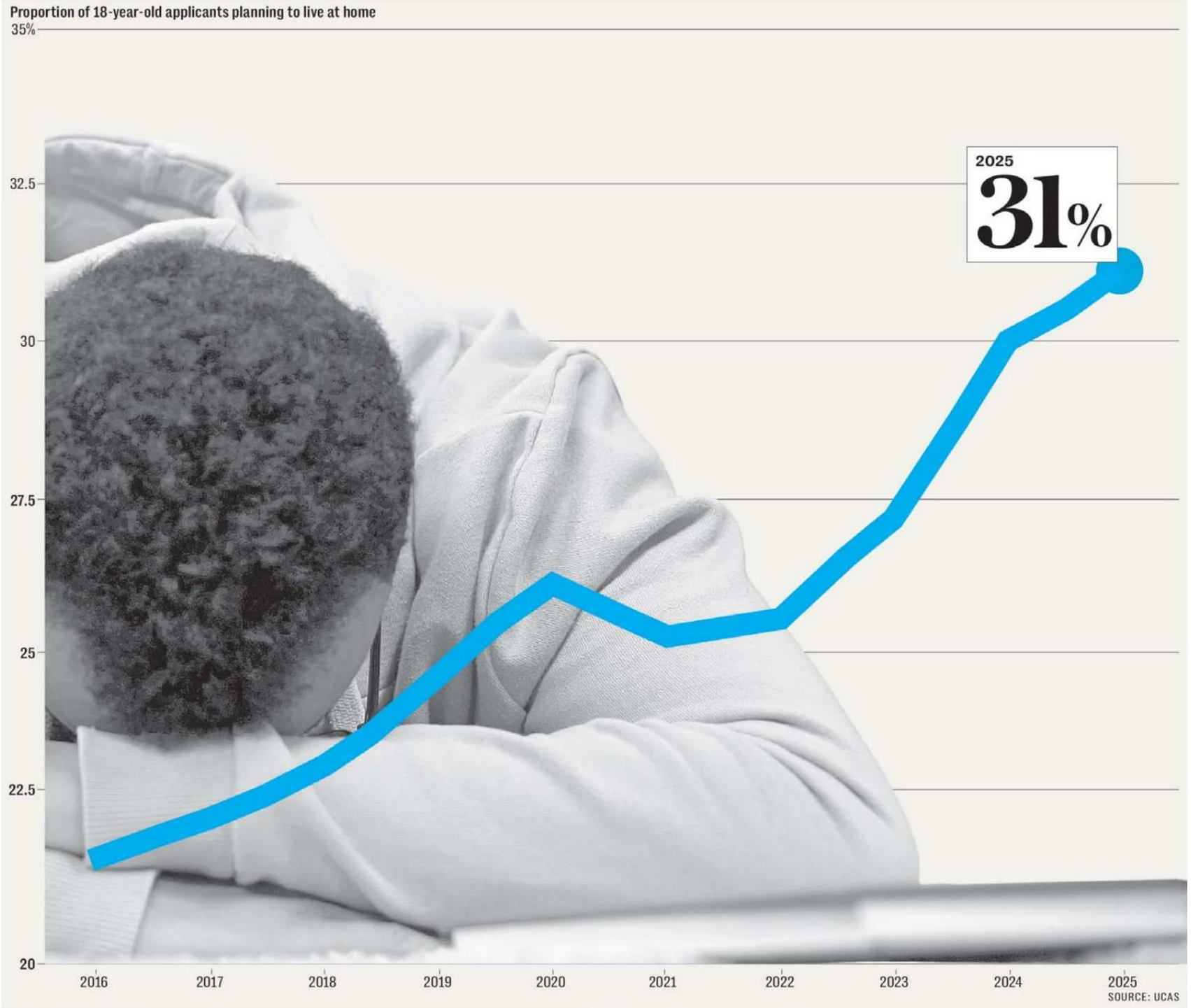
The student housing crunch is not universal. Demand for flats at the UK's strongest universities, such as Oxbridge, remains robust, says Unite. Ucas applications are up 8pc at elite universities, while Manchester, despite being one of the priciest cities for student renters, has remained buoyant.

Back in Nottingham, the city council's Seddon maintains that the vacancy rate "isn't a problem" and that more student developments could translate into more homes. The council is preparing planning guidance on how student rooms could potentially be converted to "co-living" spaces. But it is far from clear how appealing that will be to professionals and young families.

Nottingham – which built more new student rooms than any city outside London last year – is at the forefront of a reckoning that more cities will soon feel.

Young students are staying put

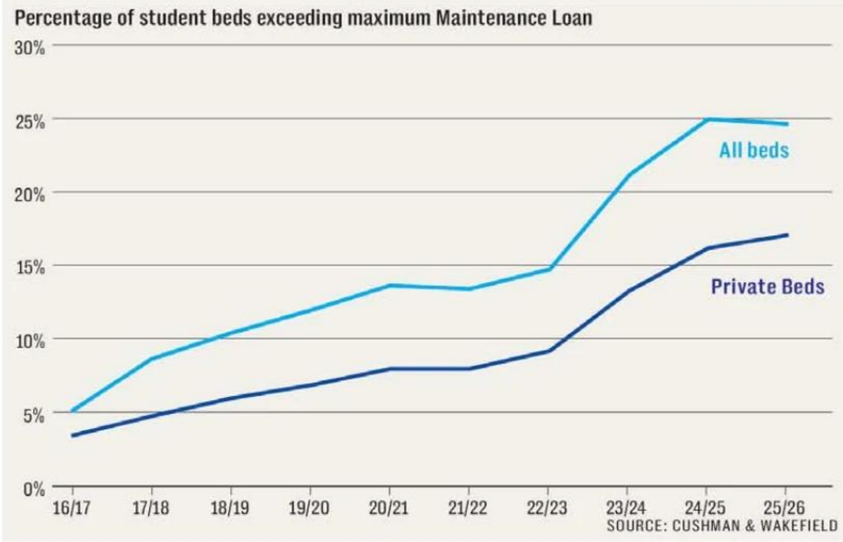
Proportion of 18-year-old applicants planning to live at home



SOURCE: UCAS

Growing affordability struggle

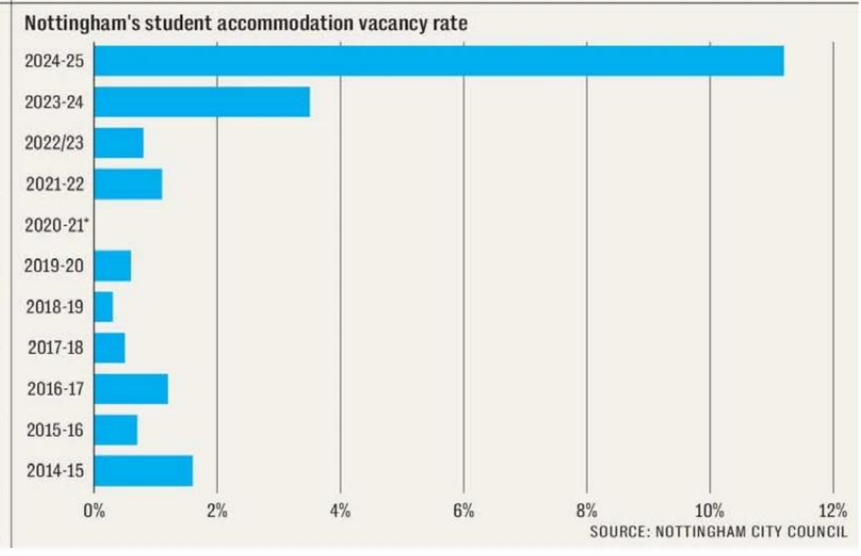
Percentage of student beds exceeding maximum Maintenance Loan



SOURCE: CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

Worrying number of empty beds

Nottingham's student accommodation vacancy rate



SOURCE: NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

Rise of the Greens threatens higher taxes under Starmer

Labour could be forced to copy rivals to win back voters before May polls. By *Emma Taggart*

AFTER the Greens pushed Labour into a humiliating third place in the by-election for the supposedly safe seat of Gorton and Denton, Sir Keir Starmer was quick to denounce their "extreme" policies.

Yet the Prime Minister may have little choice but to copy some of the Green Party's ideas.

The stinging loss prompted warnings that Labour has spent too much time focused on Reform on the Right, losing support in its heartlands in the North of England as a result.

For all their environmental ideals, Hannah Spencer, the newly elected Green MP, made clear on Friday that the party was prepared to take the fight to Labour on the economy.

Standing in Manchester Central Convention Complex, Spencer said: "People in their thousands told me, on the doorsteps and at the ballot box, that what we are sick of is being let down and looked down on, that we are sick of our hard work making other people rich." The by-election result raises pressure on Sir Keir to match some of the Green Party's proposals and win back disaffected voters before May's local elections.

Labour could look to try and match the plan from Zack Polanski, the Green Party leader, to reshape how the nation taxes land and property. In the party's 2024 manifesto is a long-term pledge to move towards a land value tax, which it says would ensure that "those with the most valuable and largest land holdings would contribute the most".

The policy is seen as a potential replacement for business rates and the council tax system, which the Greens argue is "regressive".

Paul Johnson, the former director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, says the proposal "seems to be the least odd of their economic policies".

"Valuing the land separate from the property is difficult but if you could make that work, you would have a better tax system than the one we've got at the moment," he says.

The idea of a land value tax has been mooted by Labour before. John McDonnell, then the shadow chancellor, said back in 2018 that the party was considering a land value tax as a way to raise revenue for cash-strapped local authorities. McDonnell is president of the Labour Land Campaign, which has campaigned for the policy since the 1990s.

In the run-up to last year's Budget, a group of more than a dozen Labour MPs called for Rachel Reeves to scrap council tax and launch a full review of the UK's property taxation.

However, such an extensive shake-up would take years to complete and not all are convinced of its merits.

"A land value tax seems like a good idea on paper – although it could unfairly hit those who are land-rich but cash poor, disincentivise development and target economic hotspots," says Tom Bill, the head of UK residential research at Knight Frank. "However, the biggest hurdle it faces is the logistical challenge of valuing land, which is far more complex than valuing property. One clear winner from a land value tax would be lawyers."

Hannah Spencer and Zack Polanski celebrate the Gorton and Denton by-election win

For wealthy homeowners, the Green Party's proposal is likely to prompt nervousness. Labour has signalled its willingness to go after the property-wealthy: the Chancellor unveiled a mansion tax on homes valued at more than £2m in her Budget last year.

John Muellbauer, a professor of economics at the University of Oxford, says the complicated nature of reforming property taxation means "it certainly could not be done in the reigning lifetime of this parliament".

That doesn't mean Labour couldn't lay the groundwork for reforms in an effort to head off the threat of the Greens on the Left. Land is just one area where the Greens have said they will impose levies on wealthy Britons.

The party has also pledged to introduce an annual wealth tax of 1pc on households with net assets above £10m if elected, as well as a 2pc levy on assets above £1bn, with the aim of collecting revenue from the ultra-wealthy. "It seems like a magic way to raise lots of money from very wealthy people but it doesn't really work like that," says Dan Neidle, a tax lawyer and the founder of Tax Policy Associates.

"It would take many years to implement. The very wealthy will mainly escape it because it's so easy for them to shift the amount of time they spend in the UK."

This will mean the wealth tax is unlikely to raise the amount of revenue the party has estimated, he adds.

It's not just billionaires that the Greens are looking to tax. Middle-class Britons would also see their HMRC bills rise under their proposals.

The party has pledged to remove the upper earnings limit for employee National Insurance contributions. This means those earning more than £50,270 would pay an 8pc National Insurance rate on their entire income. Currently, it drops to 2pc for earnings more than £50,270.

For those with incomes between £50,270 and £125,140, their marginal tax rate would increase from 42pc to 48pc. "That is a very high rate on a salary that isn't huge," Neidle says. "If you add student loans into that then suddenly you're looking at a 57pc tax rate for a graduate. "These are the Green Party's key voters, recent graduates. I don't think they thought this through." As well as a pledge to increase taxes, the Green Party has also said it would advocate for an increase in welfare spending as part of its cost of living push. This includes increasing all disability benefits by 5pc as well as raising Universal Credit and legacy benefits by £40 a week.

Calculations by *The Telegraph* estimate these proposals would require an additional £19.5bn in government spending.

Jagjit Chadha, a professor of economics at Cambridge University, said that while it is "critical" to provide support to those with genuine need, raising benefits too high could cause people to opt out of working.

"It means that people don't necessarily enter the labour force in the way they would otherwise and if they don't enter the labour force, we immediately lose their tax revenues."

As Sir Keir searches for ways to appeal to disaffected Labour voters, he will also be wary of any bond market fluctuations.

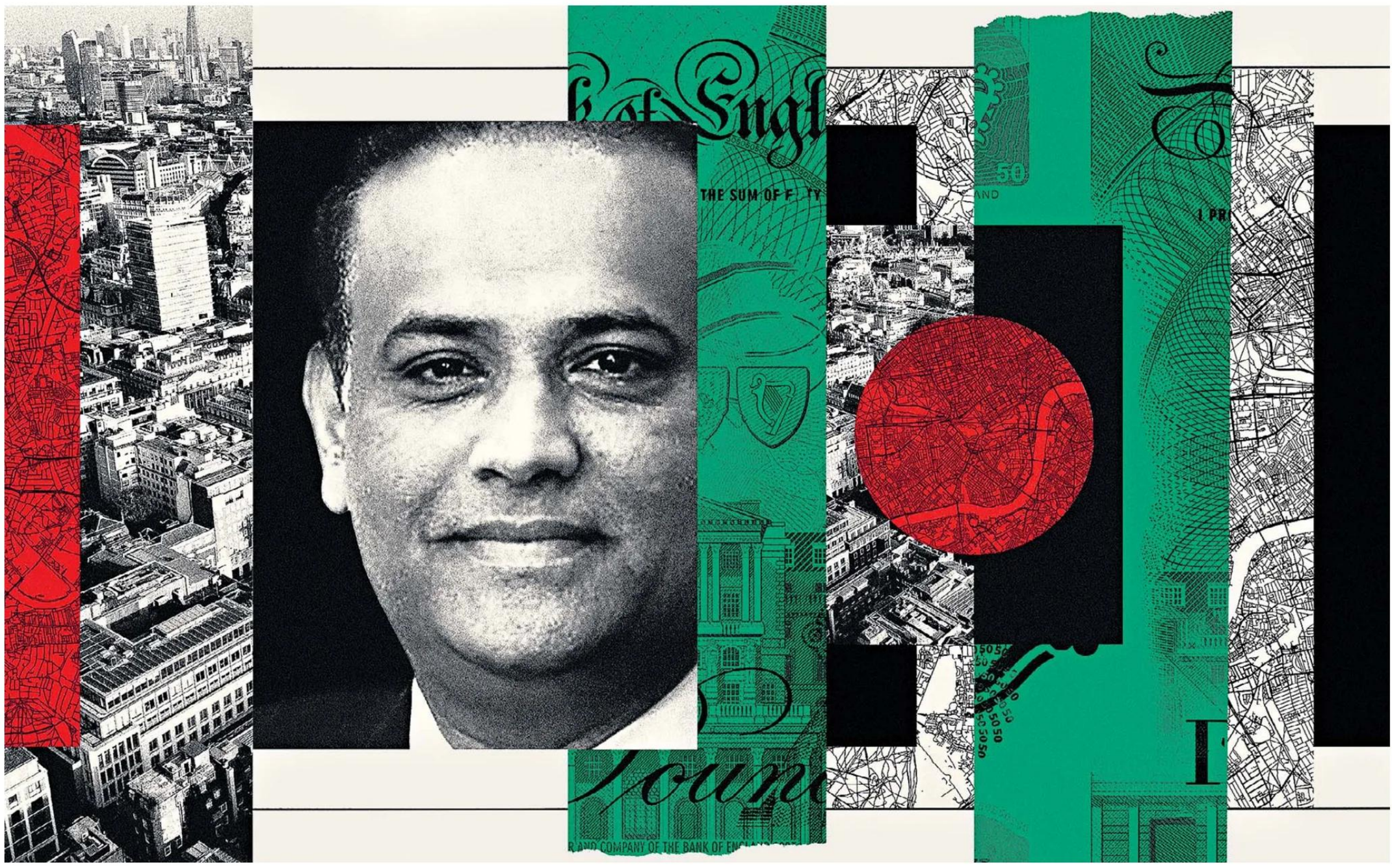
Adopting Polanski's approach of implementing a land value tax looks to be the most likely policy area where the Prime Minister could show the electorate he is prepared to shift Left.

However, even if Sir Keir were to adopt a land value tax in an effort to take on the Green Party, he would undoubtedly come up against one key stumbling block: time.

"If it was done on homes, you'd have to have a complete revaluation of all 26 million properties. It's not such a simple task," says Muellbauer.

City lender at centre of £900m fraud scandal

Implosion of UK property lender has repercussions for Bangladeshi elite and Wall Street. By *Tom Saunders*



ASKED by *Asian Voice* to name his idols, Paresh Raja picked the villain from Oliver Stone's film *Wall Street* and a mob boss from *The Godfather*. "I can appreciate some of the drive behind Gordon Gekko and Vito Corleone, setting aside what it's used for," Raja told the publication in 2023.

It is a comment he may now regret. Earlier this week Raja's company, Market Financial Solutions (MFS), tipped into administration amid allegations of fraud. Court documents seen by Bloomberg show a £930m black hole on its balance sheet.

The implosion of the Mayfair-based "shadow bank" has sent shock waves through Wall Street and the City of London as lenders that backed the business scramble to work out how much they stand to lose. Bankers are on edge following the collapse of two other private credit lenders.

The case has also resurfaced the lender's links to the Bangladeshi elite. MFS was a backer of property deals struck by Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Bangladesh's former land minister. His property empire is now the subject of an investigation by the National Crime Agency (NCA). Authorities have not accused Raja or MFS of wrongdoing.

Raja, 58, founded MFS with his wife, Tiba, in 2006. The lender provided what it called "complex, property-backed lending". The company's main products included buy-to-let mortgage and bridging loans – short-term debt that borrowers could use for various kinds of investments in real assets.

MFS's website stated Raja was "committed to supporting property investors who encounter difficulties with – or are simply not suitable for – the high street banks".

"We find ourselves regularly supporting borrowers who have been turned away on the high street," Raja told *Asian Voice*. "We're always happy to hear from those who may have missed payments on their record, who are based overseas, or who are looking to invest in less common property types." A client of MFS during its rise was Chowdhury. Companies linked to Chowdhury built up a portfolio of properties in the UK in his five-year tenure before he and his government were ousted in August 2024.

According to the *Financial Times*, Chowdhury-linked businesses took out hundreds of secured loans from lenders linked to MFS following his appointment as land minister in 2019.

After the fall of prime minister Sheikh Hasina's regime in 2024, it appears that nearly all of the MFS-linked mortgages were repaid. However, the property empire has become the subject of a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation in the UK. In June, the NCA froze UK property worth £170m belonging to the former minister. Authorities have not accused Raja or MFS of wrongdoing. At the time, lawyers for Raja said that MFS had "a large underwriting team who scrutinise every loan and carry out detailed and thorough anti-money laundering and other checks". They emphasised that Raja "has no connection to Bangladesh or the Hasina government".

Labour MP Tulip Siddiq resigned as Treasury minister over the anti-corruption scandal in Bangladesh

MFS differed in important ways from mainstream banks. It was a so-called shadow bank, meaning it offered loans but did not take deposits. As a result, it was not subject to the strict regulations imposed on high street lenders.

Before its collapse, the business appeared to be going from strength to strength. As of last March, it said it had secured an additional £1bn in capital from institutional investors, boasting a loan book of nearly £2.5bn.

Just 11 months before MFS tipped into administration, Raja said it was targeting a loan book of £3.5bn over the next year.

A sports-lover who "regularly carves out time in his busy schedule to attend important sporting events", MFS's website said Raja travelled the world to watch football, cricket, Formula 1 and tennis. He also spoke frequently to specialist finance media, tweeting as recently as December about his various appearances in the press. However, last week insolvency practitioners from Alix Partners were appointed after two companies linked to Market Financial Solutions, Amber Bridging and Zircon Bridging, alleged that there were "serious irregularities" in its finances. According to Bloomberg, the pair accused MFS of using the same assets to back multiple loans, which may have led to an "unaccounted-for deficiency" of more than 80pc on £1.2bn of debts.

Approving the administration application last week, Justice Briggs said: "The allegations of fraud are very serious."

"Mr Raja has failed to comply with the court order to appoint administrators and there is a need to protect assets available for creditors quickly," the Judge said according to a report by debt industry publication 9fin.

At the time of the administration, Raja said the process did "not reflect a failure of the underlying business or the quality of our assets, but rather a technical and procedural impasse that has temporarily limited our access to everyday banking facilities". He added that it was "an extremely difficult moment for everyone connected with Market Financial Solutions." As AlixPartners sifts through the wreckage, analysts are already debating the scale of the losses that some of the biggest banks might face.

A cast of high-profile banks, including Santander, Wells Fargo, Jefferies and Barclays are understood to have funded MFS's loans. Barclays, which has exposure of roughly £600m, had opened bank accounts for the company, but froze them in recent weeks. Wall Street bank Jefferies is understood to have around £100m tied up in MFS, while Atlas, the structured-credit arm of Apollo Global Management, had £400m of exposure.

After MFS slipped into administration, shares of Jefferies slumped as much as 9.8pc, while Barclays fell by as much as 3.8pc and Apollo's stock slid as much as 4.7pc.

Commentary from Citi suggested that losses for Barclays at least could be smaller than the initial figure of £600m, while BMO Markets noted that most of Jefferies's loans weren't processed by MFS itself, meaning losses could be lower.

However, the crisis has shaken confidence at a time when the world of high finance is already on edge. The allegations of fraud are reminiscent of two major collapses that rattled the private credit sector last year: US auto lender Tricolor Holdings and auto parts supplier First Brands Group.

> 'We did see this in '05, '06 and '07 – everyone was making a lot of money. I see a couple people doing some dumb things'

Barclays has already booked losses on its loans to Tricolor, while Jefferies and Santander were both stung by the collapse of First Brands Group. Credit markets have become spooked by a growing number of what Jamie Dimon, the boss of JPMorgan, dubbed "cockroaches" in the private credit market. Last week Dimon drew parallels between today's markets and the era before the financial crisis.

"Unfortunately, we did see this in '05, '06 and '07, almost the same thing – the rising tide was lifting all boats, everyone was making a lot of money," he said. "I see a couple people doing some dumb things."

Meanwhile, the fall-out from property deals linked to Hasina's Bangladesh government continues.

Authorities in Bangladesh are also looking into Chowdhury's affairs amid a broader investigation into flats and houses bought by former allies and family members of the prime minister.

Labour MP Tulip Siddiq, Hasina's niece, resigned as Treasury minister earlier this year over the anti-corruption scandal in Bangladesh. Siddiq faces a corruption trial over claims that she illegally received a plot of land from her aunt's government. She denies the allegations. Raja did not respond to a request for comment.

The Telegraph was unable to reach Chowdhury for comment.

Labour pushed bookies to the brink. This new craze could finish them off

Sites letting people bet against each other are coming to the UK. It's bad news for gambling giants

By **Tom Haynes** *and* **Eleanor Harmsworth**

A DECADE ago, netting a windfall from an incompetent government would have required a complex web of insider trading – but in 2026, all it took for Alan Cole was placing a bet on his phone.

Cole made a simple wager that despite Elon Musk's pledges to shrink the federal government, quarterly spending in 2025 would exceed that of 2024. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, he bet his entire life savings, $342,195 (£253,180) on the prediction, taking the opposite position to traders who wagered that Musk would shrink the federal government. Cole won $470,300 (£347,960) – a 37pc profit.

Such a bet would not be possible in Britain today, but one day it almost certainly will be, as so-called prediction markets make their way overseas.

Soon punters will be able to wager on esoteric "yes-no" prospects such as whether a White House briefing will last longer than 40 seconds, or whether or not Volodymyr Zelensky will be wearing a suit by July – both real bets available to make on US platforms Kalshi and Polymarket, respectively.

The two businesses have become shorthand for the prediction market craze where, unlike for traditional gambling, the companies involved act as financial exchanges where users buy and sell contracts tied to real-world events – elections, inflation figures or corporate results – rather than placing a fixed wager. Here, traders, not the companies, take the other side of the bet.

Already, Kalshi and Polymarket's soaring popularity is starting to eat into the bottom lines of US gambling giants.

Between them, the companies grabbed an estimated $630m in Super Bowl bets in 2026, leading to a drop of 2pc in traditional sportsbook betting compared to last year. Meanwhile, global gambling heavyweights have seen share prices plummet over concerns that more bets will start to be made on prediction markets instead.

Shares in Paddy Power owner Flutter have tanked by more than 40pc in 2026, while DraftKings, the second-largest online sports betting platform in the US, has similarly suffered a $5.7bn drop in its value this year.

Peter Jackson, Flutter's boss, sought to downplay the potential threat last week, saying the company was "never complacent" in the face of competition.

It is planning to introduce a new loyalty programme for US sports betting brand FanDuel to keep people betting via its website. For Flutter, holding on to customers will be critical, with its latest set of results described by US-based Citizens Bank analysts as "the worst in recent memory".

Smaller firms in Britain are embracing the prediction market craze. One such platform, Matchbook, announced in December that it would soon launch the UK's first licensed offering.

While a trial has yet to be rolled out to consumers, the arrival of a new challenger is the last thing Britain's beleaguered gambling sector needs.

In her most recent Budget, Rachel Reeves imposed tax rises worth £1bn on the sector, including a rise in remote gaming duty from 21pc to 40pc, and a new remote betting rate of 25pc, with a lower 15pc rate for horse-racing.

A slew of profit warnings came in the weeks that followed. Late last year, Ladbrokes owner Entain, which is due to publish its full-year results on Thursday, warned of a £100m dent in profits in 2026, rising to £150m from 2027.

British jockeys gather to protest possible government tax increases, above; Rachel Reeves imposed tax rises worth £1bn on the sector in her most recent Budget

William Hill owner Evoke faces a £136m hit this year, and floated plans of either an outright sale of the entire group or a partial sell-off of its divisions in December.

Flutter claimed the Budget was a "victory for illegal operators", as it warned of a £235m loss over 2026.

A spokesman for the Betting and Gaming Council said the Chancellor's tax increases and "the growing cumulative burden of regulation are making it increasingly difficult for licensed British businesses to compete in".

When prediction markets finally make their way to Britain, they could face similarly burdensome regulations.

Much of the furore around prediction markets in the US has been over whether they should be regulated as a gambling or a financial product. This debate is a non-factor in Britain, with the Gambling Commission having been clear that prediction markets would fall under its remit.

"It is unlikely the commercial drivers for prediction markets are the same here as in the United States," the watchdog said. "There are notable differences between the gambling market in Great Britain and the United States.

"Sports betting is established and available across the whole of Great Britain under a single overarching regulatory framework." However, prediction markets are expected to pay less tax than typical betting shops.

"The attractions of a prediction market are around the tax structure," says Greg Johnson, an analyst at Shore Capital. "The tax burden is lower because the operator doesn't pay a 25pc tax on sports betting in the same way. Theoretically, that means you can have a higher payout ratio, or better odds."

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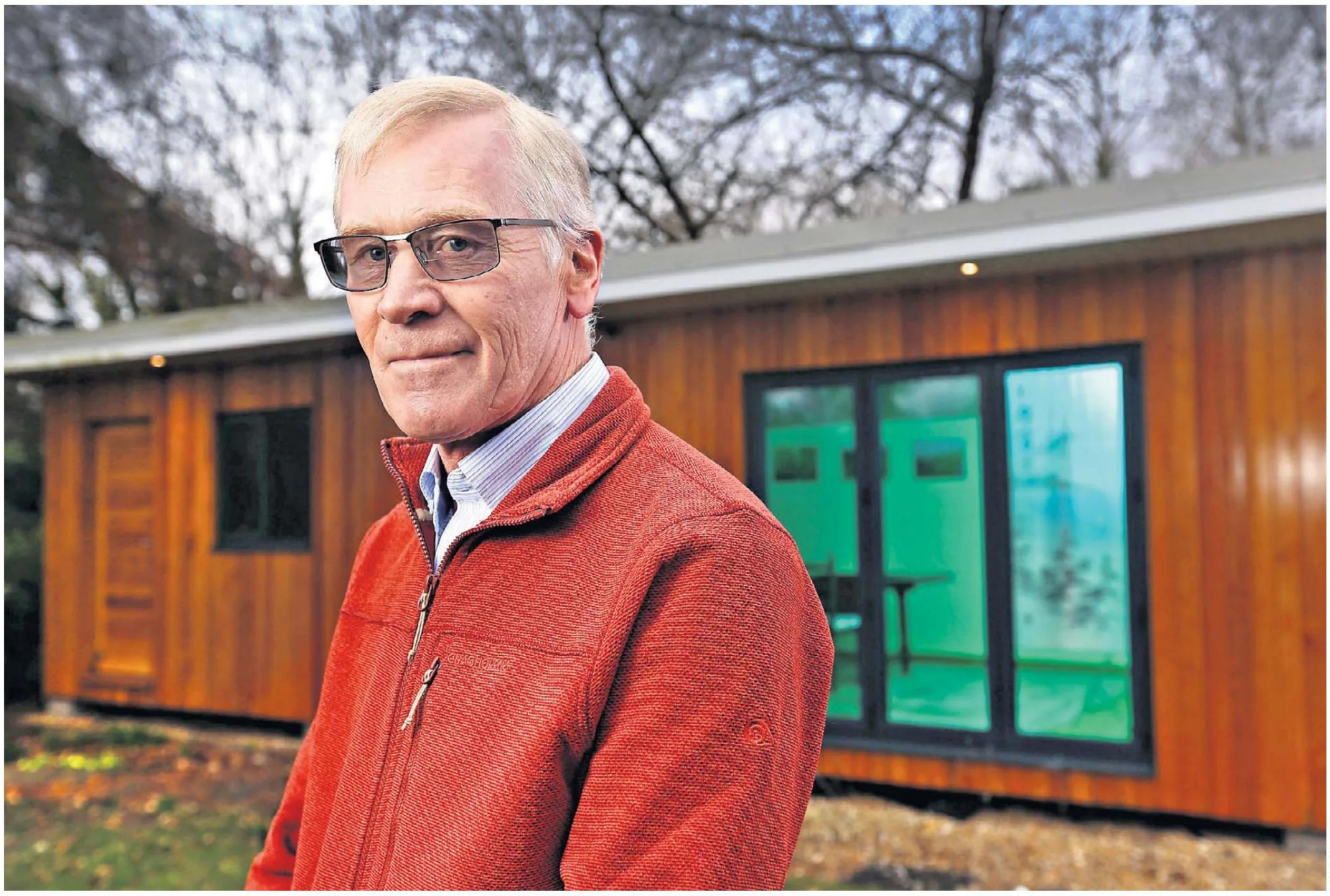

LORNE CAMPBELL

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Freelancers will head for exit if they must file finances four times a year

Self-employed weigh up whether Making Tax Digital's quarterly burden is worth it. By Ruby Cline

Linda McQueen is a freelance copy editor, so in theory she can work "basically forever", the 62-year-old says. But the Government's digital tax overhaul means she won't.

HMRC's Making Tax Digital (MTD) programme will push thousands of landlords and self-employed workers on to a new system, which forces them to file financial information four times a year via a selection of HMRC-approved software.

The taxman claims the move will make tax returns simpler, but many workers are considering cutting their hours, pay or stopping self-employed work altogether to avoid the cost of the software and complications caused by the new measures. Many older workers are taking early retirement simply to avoid the increased layers of bureaucracy, which McQueen suspects will "all go wrong".

Steve Thistlethwaite
Former material engineer, 64, considers himself semi-retired

'It's a new system and I don't really want to be the guinea pig'

On April 6, landlords and self-employed workers with an income of more than £50,000 a year will be forced on to the scheme, which requires them to submit four rounds of tax information. The thresholds will get increasingly lower over the next few years, affecting those with revenue of more than £30,000 in 2027, then £20,000 in 2028.

So far, the Government has not indicated when or whether landlords who make less than £20,000 a year will have to use the scheme. McQueen says that her income "verges just above and below the £20,000 threshold".

She adds: "I've always done my own tax returns so I'm not scared of it. But I just can't be bothered. I'm thinking, my private pension doesn't start until 67 but maybe I can retire early and tide myself over. I was on the verge anyway and this is the push. It's one of those unintended consequences that they won't get my taxes."

Almost half of self-employed workers are aged over 50, and more than one in 10 are over 65, according to data from the Office for National Statistics.

This means older workers will take on the bulk of the administrative work required by the new scheme.

They will need to make four quarterly submissions, as well as a year-end final declaration, all to be submitted via HMRC-approved third-party software.

"Copy-editing doesn't take physical strength. I had absolutely intended to carry on working into my 70s; most proofreaders and editors work for a long time into their 70s," says McQueen, who is based in west London.

But like many, she is distrustful of HMRC's ability to serve customers who face technical difficulties and growing pains on the new scheme.

"HMRC has been a nightmare to deal with recently. In 2001, when I first went freelance part-time, you could always get someone on the phone and they'd know what they were talking about.

"It's impossible to get someone on the phone now, and I don't trust they'll get it right. I don't trust they will have the support for people uploading things four times a year, and I don't trust their calculations."

£50k
Taxing times
Threshold for landlords and self-employed to use Making Tax Digital this year

£850m
Before rollout
Cost to the Government of delays and snags of new system

The programme, which was announced in 2015, has been beset by more than a decade of delays, policy changes and snags, costing the Government £850m before it has even been fully rolled out, *The Telegraph* revealed earlier this month.

McQueen adds: "It's like HS2 where they just keep going because they've gone on too long, like a wedding when you've gone too far and spent too much. I don't want to be a guinea pig for HMRC'

The adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" comes to mind for Steve Thistlethwaite. The 64-year-old former material engineer and sales manager considers himself semi-retired.

He was made redundant six years ago and has freelanced part-time since then.

He has pencilled in April 2029 to retire, but is weighing up his financial options until then because of MTD.

Thistlethwaite, based north of Manchester, was just below the £50,000 threshold for mandatory MTD this year. He wants to keep working, but says he doesn't need the money. He is yet to decide whether learning a new tax system is worth the continued work.

"My civil partner passed away 12 years ago, so I think it would be good to stay actively engaged," he says. "But it's a new system and I don't really want to be the guinea pig."

HMRC has done little to alleviate his concerns. He adds: "I'm going to have to learn a new system and then keep two systems going simultaneously – there aren't any free systems that can cope with what I want to do."

If Thistlethwaite moves on to the new system in 2027, he will still need to retrospectively file his 2025-26 and 2026-27 returns on the old system, meaning he will be filing using the old and new systems at the same time.

Workers will need to send a quarterly update even if they do not incur income and can opt out of the digital programme only after three consecutive years below the threshold, according to HMRC.

Working past 2029 "makes absolutely no sense" for Thistlethwaite, he says. He plans to maximise pension contributions until then and then fully retire, at which point he will receive defined benefit and defined contribution pensions.

"I guess it'll be a question of how much work it's going to be.

"Will it annoy me enough to say, well, I'm just going to work less, put what I get into my pension so I can retire earlier? I don't know.

"If you make work difficult, then you get less of it."

An HMRC spokesman said: "Making Tax Digital will make it easier for sole traders and landlords to get their tax right by providing a more real-time overview of their finances, freeing up their time to focus on growing their business.

"People can find out more about how to prepare by searching Making Tax Digital on Gov.uk."

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This is most valuable death duty form you will ever fill in

Telegraph Money explains how IHT403 could shave off thousands from your inheritance tax bill. By Rachel Wait

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NOT A PENNY MORE

£250

The small gifts allowance can only be used to cover a single gift of this amount or less to an individual

Death comes with a lot of paperwork. Executors can expect to spend around a year administering an estate and might not be interested in adding yet another form to their list – but IHT403 could be the key to saving thousands in inheritance tax.

This supplementary form sits alongside the main IHT400 return and records lifetime gifts so that HMRC can work out whether tax is due. This makes it critical to understand how to complete the form accurately.

WHAT IS FORM IHT403 FOR?

Form IHT403 is the paperwork used to report any gifts made by the deceased in the seven years before their death.

Under the seven-year rule, gifts are considered as being outside your estate only if you survive for a full seven years after making them, though there are some exemptions.

Rahul Kotecha, of law firm Freeths, says: "Form IHT403 is HMRC's deep dive into a person's lifetime gifting. It tells the taxman exactly what left the estate before death and when."

Some gifts do not need to be reported on the form. These include:

- Gifts made using the £3,000 annual exemption;
- Small gifts of £250 or less;
- Gifts made to a spouse or civil partner.

But any gifts outside these exemptions must be reported accurately.

If inheritance tax is payable on gifts, taper relief may apply if the donor survived the gift by more than three years, but it is important not to deduct this on the form as this will be applied later by HMRC. Taper relief only reduces the tax payable, not the value of the gift.

WHO FILLS OUT FORM IHT403?

Form IHT403 must be completed by the executor of the estate, or the administrator if someone has died without a will. It is filed alongside form IHT400. Michaela Lamb, of accountancy firm Gravita, says: "Inheritance tax (or at least the first instalment) is due to be paid to HMRC six months after the month someone dies.

"However, the form itself does not need to be submitted to HMRC until a further six months after that."

Although form IHT403 is typically used after death, because of its complexity, it is important to maintain accurate financial records during your lifetime. This will enable your executor to more easily establish who has received gifts and when.

Reviewing the form yourself can also give you a clearer idea of what is required, according to Madeleine Beresford, of TWM Solicitors.

"It is helpful to complete the form as an estate planning exercise and review it every year along with your tax return, on a rolling seven-year basis," she says.

"It can be very laborious for an executor to try to backfill the data, so to keep a working copy in real time is invaluable, particularly when it comes to normal gifts out of income."

HOW TO TACKLE EACH SECTION

Completing form IHT403 can be a daunting task for executors. It is best to break it down section by section and take your time completing it.

Have the deceased's financial records and bank statements to hand to help.

PERSONAL DETAILS

As an executor, the first step is to fill in the name of the deceased, the date of death and their inheritance tax reference number, if you know it.

GIFTS MADE WITHIN SEVEN YEARS BEFORE DEATH

In the next section, you will need to provide contact details for anyone who has received a gift from the deceased within the last seven years of their life, where the gift exceeds the available exemptions.

If the recipient has authorised you to deal with HMRC on their behalf, you must provide their contact details.

For each gift, you must outline the following:

- The date it was made;
- The name and relationship of the recipient (including charities or other organisations);
- A description of the gift, such as cash, shares or property;
- The value at the time of the gift.

You will then need to deduct any available exemptions and then calculate the net value of the gift. As an example, if the gift was £5,000, you would record this first.

If the deceased had not already used their £3,000 annual exemption that year, you would deduct it and report £2,000 in the net value box.

However, you cannot do this with the £250 small gift exemption and this is where mistakes often occur, according to Sarah Paton, of solicitors Irwin Mitchell. "The £250 small gifts allowance can only be used to cover a single gift of £250 or less to an individual," she says.

"If the individual received £350, the executors cannot deduct the small gift allowance of £250 and just report the excess of £100. In those circumstances, the gift exemption does not apply at all."

In other cases, executors fail to claim all the allowances available.

Paton adds: "For example, if the deceased did not use their annual gifting exemption of £3,000 one year, they can bring it forward and then gift up to £6,000 the following tax year."

Trust transfers and life insurance premiums are another commonly overlooked area, but must also typically go in this section.

Kotecha says: "Any trust the deceased created or added to must be disclosed, along with premiums paid on policies benefiting others.

"These don't sit in the 'gifts out of income' section by default. HMRC expects them to be recorded in the earlier 'lifetime transfers' sections of IHT403, unless the executor can prove they qualify as normal expenditure out of income."

GIFTS WITH RESERVATION OF BENEFIT

This section of the form relates to "gifts with reservation of benefit".

This occurs when someone gives away their home (or other asset), but continues to benefit from it – for example, continuing to live in the property rent free.

Lamb says: "This sort of IHT planning doesn't work and the house remains in the estate for tax purposes. These gifts must be reported on the IHT403 because they are still subject in full to IHT on the value at death, even if the person has 'given them away'."

A related rule, pre-owned assets tax, stops people from trying to work around this, for instance by giving cash to children to buy a home the parents live in. HMRC treats these gifts as taxable too, so they must also be recorded on form IHT403.

GIFTS MADE AS PART OF NORMAL EXPENDITURE OUT OF INCOME

Finally, the last section of the form covers normal gifts out of income. This refers to money that was given away regularly without significantly changing the deceased's lifestyle.

It is probably the most arduous stage of the IHT403, according to Beresford. "It requires a full breakdown of the person's income and expenditure, by category, over the last seven years," she says.

"If the net result is that the deceased was able to maintain their usual standard of living out of income, any excess income can be gifted and, provided there was some regularity to these payments – such as school fees – they will fall outside of the usual rules on gifting, even if made within the last seven years."

Note that if there is any tax payable on the gift, this is not payable from the estate, as many people believe.

Instead, it is usually paid by the recipient of the gift.

HOW TO SUBMIT FORM IHT403

Form IHT403 must be submitted with the main form, IHT400. You can do this online or by sending the form by post to: Inheritance tax, HMRC, BX9 1HT.

Beresford says: "HMRC will then issue a code, which you need in order to apply for probate."

Left's affordable housing obsession misses the point

Comment

Michael Mosbacher

What does Labour's defeat in the Gorton and Denton by-election mean?

Endless interpretations will be offered – usually arguing that the solution to our main parties' woes will be whichever policies the writer already favours – but one thing we can be sure of is ministers declaring their unrelenting commitment to making housing more affordable.

Perhaps the single greatest factor that is making younger voters ever more disillusioned about the state of their lives is the unaffordability of decent housing.

This is not an issue restricted to Britain. The inability of first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder, or having to delay for years the purchase of their first home, is fomenting anomie throughout the West. From Switzerland to the United States, the domestically disenfranchised are, quite rightly, feeling sorry for themselves. But Britain's unpropertied, especially those living in London and the South East, must be near the top of any table of housing rage.

It is clear that this righteous anger is a major factor in the increasing public rupture with the old parties. The anger about immigration fuelling the rise of Reform, it can be argued, is merely a symptom of this wider discontent. The surging support for the Greens is in part explained by Leftist voters losing hope that Labour's – in their eyes – tepid socialism will ever deliver the promised land of affordable, secure housing in a place where people want to live.

It is no surprise that politicians want to offer solutions, but the problem is that many of these schemes will only make matters worse. New housing must be made affordable by diktat, they will state. If the market does not deliver homes at the right price, the thinking goes, then developers must be forced to offer more of their new builds at regulated, affordable prices.

Planning permission will only be granted for new housing if a growing share of homes are offered at below market rates. This has been the thinking for over a quarter of a century. The last Tory government, too, proclaimed their devotion to this nostrum. It had taken root in the Blair/Brown years, as a way of expanding social housing without the state itself building – and having to pay for – new homes.

With this Labour government's obsession with equality as the ultimate purpose of politics, such solutions have been turbocharged.

The problem with this approach is that it will inevitably reduce the supply of new housing. Developers will build less if their profits are truncated – they are no different from any other business. But it is increased supply that is the greatest engine to making housing more affordable. A study of the Swiss housing market by Lukas Hauck and Frederic Kluser, of the University of Bern, makes this point brilliantly. They ask if new housing only benefits the affluent – and show that it does not. In the Swiss case, new builds do indeed attract the better off, but this frees up housing further down the chain and makes it more attainable for all. These benefits are not just enjoyed in the immediate area of the new development; the study shows that the ripples can be felt nationwide.

As with any other product, increasing supply will lower prices. If demand is surging, prices may still go up – but they would have gone up more steeply without that extra supply. So anything governments do to reduce supply will have the opposite effect.

If Labour really wants to stymie the rise of both the Greens and Reform, the most effective thing this government can do is increase the supply of housing. Policies specifically targeted at making more low-cost housing available will be much less effective.

Building new homes, it must be acknowledged, is much more easily said than done. All recent governments have pledged to do so. As planning minister in David Cameron's Tory administration, Nick Boles, for example, was evangelical on the issue. But the results have been mixed – and that would be a generous assessment.

The United Kingdom has one of the most sclerotic planning systems, which is the major cause of our housing crisis. And while many will benefit from its loosening, the losers are so much more aware of who they are. Those who don't want the fields near their existing homes concreted over, for example. Nimbys will always make their voices heard.

Falling house prices are a benefit for the country as a whole. But they will feel precisely the opposite to those whose principal asset becomes less valuable. There is no point in denying that some will indeed be losers from a freed up planning system. To square these issues, political leaders are needed who have skills that appear remarkably absent from the current crop.

But building more homes, any homes, is the only sustainable solution to our housing discontents. If we continue along our current path, expect support for the political insurgents to keep increasing. But they, too, display little appetite for doing what must be done – letting the bulldozers loose.

Increased supply is the greatest engine to making housing more affordable

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Which? Recommended Provider

Television & Radio

What to watch

FIRES OF THE MOON
Channel 4, 10pm

This gloriously odd Welsh opera film depicts the tortured relationship between a mother and son

Those whose St David's Day celebrations have room for something a little unconventional (or less conventional, at any rate, than BBC One's tribute to Wales's hymn-singing heritage in its *Songs of Praise* special from Penarth, at 1.15pm) should try this gloriously odd, wonderfully cinematic Welsh opera film from director Chris Forster.

It is loosely inspired by *Un Nos Ola Leuad* (*One Moonlit Night*), a 1961 novel written by poet and author Caradog Prichard that is regularly cited as a pinnacle of Welsh-language literature.

Set in the industrial quarrying communities of North Wales in the early 20th century, it's a lyrically bleak coming-of-age story depicting the tortured relationship between a mother and son, seen from his point of view as she battles poverty and descends into madness. The film, shot in aptly ravishing black and white on location in Bethesda, Llangollen and Blaenau Ffestiniog, takes the book merely as a starting point, embarking on a flight of fancy propelled by a power-packed score from composer Gareth Glyn (and librettists Iwan Teifion Davies and Patrick Young), performed with passion by tenor Huw Ynyr, soprano Elin Pritchard and others, with the Welsh National Opera Orchestra.

Gerard O'Donovan

Lord of the Flies
BBC One, 9pm
Jack Thorne's adaptation of William Golding's novel reaches its gripping conclusion. With the atmosphere increasingly irrational in Jack's (Lox Pratt) camp, Piggy (David McKenna) and Ralph (Winston Sawyers) decide to risk everything in the hope of reaching a compromise. Insights into the cast and crew's experience filming the series on remote Malaysian islands follow in *Making of Lord of the Flies* on BBC Four at 10pm.

Ralph (Winston Sawyers) comes under attack

Forensics: The Real CSI
BBC Two, 9pm
The behind-the-scenes science series returns with the investigation into the youngest fatal stabbing victim in West Midlands' history after 12-year-old Leo Ross's body was found in a park last year. Suspicion falls on a local 14-year-old, and the need to link a weapon to the murder becomes the team's biggest challenge.

The Lady
ITV1, 9pm
The drama exploring the story of Sarah Ferguson's former aide Jane Andrews (Mia McKenna-Bruce), and her conviction for murder, continues. With cracks already appearing in her relationship with boyfriend Tommy, Jane begins to unravel and a make-or-break holiday has disastrous consequences. Concludes tomorrow.

Secret Genius
Channel 4, 9pm
The competition concludes as Alan Carr and Susie Dent invite four finalists to go head-to-head. Following a fiendish opening test of deductive reasoning, only two go through to the last round to battle it out for the title.

The Actor Awards
Netflix, midnight
Live coverage of the 32nd Annual Actor Awards (formerly known as the Screen Actors Guild Awards) from Los Angeles. Nominees include a host of British talent including Oscar front-runner Jessie Buckley, Gary Oldman, Paul Mescal and Aimee Lou Wood. Kristen Bell hosts. ***GO***

FILM

The Man Who Never Was *(1956)*
BBC Two, 1.40pm ★★★★
Ronald Neame's haunting wartime spy thriller was adapted by Nigel Balchin from Ewen Montagu's book, based on the real story of Operation Mincemeat. Clifton Webb plays Montagu, the officer

Gloria Grahame and Clifton Webb star in this tense thriller

assigned to plant false papers on a human corpse and dump it in the sea near Spain, in a bizarre plan to feed misinformation to the Germans. Bizarre truth aside, it's all quite tense and surprisingly moving. Gloria Grahame co-stars.

Raiders of the Lost Ark *(1981)*
ITV1, 3.30pm ★★★★★
Steven Spielberg's rollicking adventure won four Oscars and created a new action hero in Dr Henry "Indiana" Jones (Harrison Ford). Jones is a US archaeologist hired by the government in 1936 to seek out the Ark of the Covenant before the Nazis reach it. The ensuing events are never less than exhilarating and all underpinned by John Williams's rousing score.

Main channels

BBC One

6.00 **am** Breakfast (S) **7.40** Match of the Day (R) (S) **9.00** Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg (S) **10.00** Politics England (S) **10.30** Sunday Morning Live (S) **11.30** Celebration Kitchen: Purim (S)
12.30 **pm Bargain Hunt** (AD) (R) (S)
1.00 **News; Weather** (S)
1.15 **Songs of Praise** (S)
1.50 **Lifeline** (AD) (S)
2.00 **Escape to the Country** (AD) (R) (S)
2.35 **Gladiators** (AD) (R) (S)
3.35 **FILM: Spider-Man 2** (2004) Comic-book adventure sequel starring Tobey Maguire (AD) (S)
5.35 **News** (S)
5.50 **Regional News; Weather; Weather** (S)
6.00 **Countryfile** (S)

Songs of Praise

7.00 **Antiques Roadshow** Fiona Bruce and the team return to Cromford Mills in Derbyshire (R) (S)
8.00 **Call the Midwife** A cohort of junior doctors join the midwives on their district rounds (AD) (S)
9.00 **Lord of the Flies** Ralph realises it is his turn to be hunted. Last in the series (AD) (S)
10.00 **News; Weather** (S)
10.25 **Regional News; Weather** (S)
10.30 **Match of the Day** Including Arsenal v Chelsea (S)
11.45 The Graham Norton Show **12.35 - 6.00am** News

BBC Two

6.10 **am** Take a Hike (R) (S) **6.40** Countryfile (R) (S) **7.40** Breakfast (S) **9.00** My Kind of Town (AD) (S) **9.30** Great British Menu (AD) (R) (S) **10.30** Great British Menu (AD) (R) (S) **11.30** Honey Badgers: Masters of Mayhem – Natural World (R) (S)
12.10 **pm FILM: The Lady Vanishes** (1938, b/w) Alfred Hitchcock's mystery with Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave (AD) (S)
1.40 **FILM: The Man Who Never Was** (1956) Fact-based Second World War drama starring Clifton Webb (S)
3.20 **Earth** (AD) (R) (S)
4.20 **Flog It!** (R) (S)
5.05 **FILM: Emma** (2020) Adaptation of Jane Austen's novel starring Anya Taylor-Joy (AD) (S)

Forensics: The Real CSI

7.00 **This Farming Life** Dairy farmers Lucy and Adam risk it all with a huge financial gamble (R) (S)
8.00 **Big Cats 24/7** Further coverage of lions, leopards and cheetahs in the Okavango Delta (AD) (R) (S)
9.00 **Forensics: The Real CSI** New series. A 12-year-old boy is fatally stabbed on his way home from school (AD) (S)
10.00 **FILM: Misery** (1990) Oscar-winning thriller starring James Caan (AD) (S)
11.45 FILM: Hounded (2022) Horror thriller starring Samantha Bond **1.15am** Sign Zone: Silent Witness **2.15** Sign Zone: Silent Witness **3.15** Sign Zone: Question Time **4.15 - 6.00am** This Is BBC Two

ITV1

6.00 **am** James Martin's Saturday Morning (R) (S) **8.25** Jimmy & Shivi's Farmhouse Breakfast (S) **9.25** News (S) **9.30** Love Your Weekend with Alan Titchmarsh (S) **11.25** Fletchers' Family Farm (AD) (S)
12.25 **pm News; Weather** (S)
12.35 **Julia Bradbury's Wonders of the Frozen South** (S)
1.35 **Ainsley's Taste of the Bahamas** (R) (S)
2.10 **Britain's Got Talent** (AD) (R) (S)
3.30 **FILM: Raiders of the Lost Ark** (1981) Action adventure starring Harrison Ford (AD) (S)
5.40 **The Chase Celebrity Special** (AD) (R) (S)
6.35 **News** (S)
6.45 **ITV News London; Weather** (S)

The Lady

7.00 **The Floor** The 17 remaining contestants fight for a spot in the final (AD) (S)
8.00 **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?** Big-prize quiz, hosted by Jeremy Clarkson (S)
9.00 **The Lady** Cracks appear in Jane's relationship with Tommy (AD) (S)
10.00 **News; Weather** (S)
10.15 **FILM: Bad Boys** (1995) Action thriller starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence (AD) (S)
12.20 **am** Shop on TV **3.00** The Real Unforgotten **4.00** Unwind with ITV **5.05 - 6.00am** Fletchers' Family Farm

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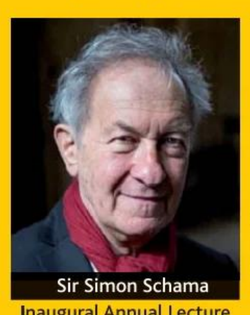
FESTIVAL ANNUAL LECTURES

John Sergeant and William Hague
Chancellor's Forum: Give me Ten Seconds
John Sergeant talks to Lord William Hague

Jonathan Dimbleby and Chris Patten
Lord Patten Free Speech Conversation
War in Palestine and the New World Order

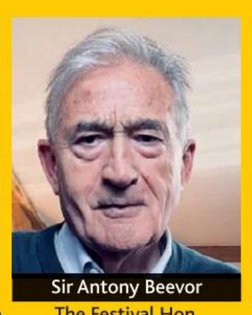

Sir Simon Schama
Inaugural Annual Lecture on Antisemitism

Julia Donaldson
The Bodley Lecture and Award of the Bodley Medal
Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

John Studzinski
A 21st Century Perspective
Our Life and Times Today

Jim Mellon
Future Tech Interview
Investor Jim Mellon talks to Professor Nick Hawes about robots working with humans

Dr Elizabeth Drayson
Voltaire Foundation Lecture
Crucible of Light: Islam and the Forging of Europe


Sir Antony Beevor
The Festival Hon. Fellowship Lecture 2026
Rasputin and the Downfall of the Romanovs

Sir Vince Cable and Lord David Isaac
Provost of Worcester Lecture
Sir Vince Cable talks to Provost Lord David Isaac about what the rise of Asian superstates means for the future

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Telegraph · PODCAST
Ukraine: The Latest

Radio choice

Drama: The Virginian
Radio 4, 3pm

Listeners of a certain age will have fond memories of the sweeping TV horse opera that ran from the 1960s into the 1970s, starring James Drury, Lee J Cobb and Doug McClure as pioneering cowboys in the American West. This two-part drama is a quieter affair, adapted from Owen Wister's landmark 1902 novel, but a nostalgic treat for western lovers nonetheless. More recent history is covered in **The Clint Boon Show** (Absolute Radio/Rayo, 10pm) as the former Inspiral Carpets keyboardist invites well-known musicians to share their influences, celebrate hidden gems and deconstruct classic tracks.

Gerard O'Donovan

RADIO 1
FM 97.6-99.8MHZ

6.00am Radio 1's Weekend Early Breakfast **7.00** Radio 1 Weekend Breakfast with James Cusack **10.00** Radio 1 00s **10.30** Newsbeat **10.32** Radio 1 00s **11.00** Radio 1 10s **12.00** Radio 1 20s **1.00pm** Sam and Danni **4.00** Radio 1's Life Hacks **6.00** The Official Chart: First Look on Radio 1 **7.00** Radio 1's Chillest Show **9.00** Radio 1's Indie Show with Alyx Holcombe **11.00** BBC Introducing on Radio 1 **1.00am** 1Xtra's R&B Show with Chuckie **2.30** 1Xtra's R&B Slow Jamz Mix with Chuckie **3.00** Radio 1's Chill Mix **3.30** Radio 1's Chill Mix **4.00** Radio 1's Workout Anthems **5.00 - 6.58am** Radio 1 Early Breakfast with Dean McCullough

RADIO 2
FM 88-90.2MHZ

6.00am Good Morning Sunday **9.00** Love Songs with Michael Ball **11.00** Paddy McGuinness **1.00pm** Elaine Paige on Sunday **3.00** Sounds of the 70s with Bob Harris **5.00** Pick of the Pops **6.00** Pick of the Pops **7.00** Tony Blackburn's Golden Hour **8.00** The Paul Gambaccini Collection **10.00** Radio 2 Unwinds with Angela Griffin **11.00** Radio 2 Unwinds with Angela Griffin **12.00** Richie Anderson **3.00am** Alternative Sounds of the 90s with Dermot O'Leary **4.00 - 6.30am** Owain Wyn Evans

RADIO 3
FM 90.2-92.4MHZ

6.30am Breakfast **9.00** Sunday Morning **12.00** Private Passions **1.30pm** Music Map **3.00** Choral Evensong **4.00** Jazz Record Requests **5.00** The Early Music Show **6.00** Words and Music **7.15** Sunday Feature: Bartók and Us **8.00** Dvorák: String Quintet Op 97. A chance to hear yesterday's Building a Library recommendation **9.00** 20th Century Radicals. Gillian Moore explores the music of Dutch radical Louis Andriessen **10.00** Compline. A reflective service of night prayer for the second Sunday in Lent **10.30** Night Tracks. A soundtrack for late-night listening **11.30** Unclassified **12.30 - 6.30am** Through the Night

RADIO 4
FM 92.4-94.6MHZ; LW 198KHZ

6.00am News Headlines **6.05** Thinking Allowed **6.35** On Your Farm **6.57** Weather **7.00** News **7.00** Sunday Papers **7.10** Sunday **7.54** Radio 4 Appeal **7.57** Weather **8.00** News **8.00** Sunday Papers **8.10** Sunday Worship **8.48** Witness History **8.58** Tweet of the Day **9.00** Broadcasting House **10.00** Desert Island Discs **11.00** The Archers **12.15pm** Profile **12.30** Just a Minute **12.57** Weather **1.00** The World This Weekend. Presented by Jonny Dymond **1.30** Currently: A Place in Politics for British Muslims **2.00** Gardeners' Question Time **2.45** Opening Lines. John Yorke explores Owen Wister's Western novel The Virginian **3.00** Drama: The Virginian **4.00** Bookclub. James Naughtie is joined by Alan Cumming to discuss Alasdair Gray's Lanark **4.30** Counterpoint. Music quiz, chaired by Paul Gambaccini **5.00** Witness History **5.10** The Verb. With guests Blake Morrison, Natalie Shapero and Tara Bergin **5.54** Shipping Forecast **5.57** Weather **6.00** Six O'Clock News **6.15** Pick of the Week **7.00** The Archers **7.15** Cannon Fodder **7.45** Lent Talks. Miro Griffiths explores power and support **8.00** Feedback **8.30** Last Word **9.00** Money Box **9.25** Radio 4 Appeal **9.30** From Our Own Correspondent **9.59** Weather **10.00** The Westminster Hour **11.00** In Our Time **11.45** Short Works **12.00** News and Weather **12.15am** Soul Music **12.45** Bells on Sunday **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.00** As World Service **5.00** News Briefing **5.04** Yesterday in Parliament **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45 - 6.00am** Farming Today

RADIO 5 LIVE
MW 693 & 909KHZ

6.00am The Martin Lewis Podcast **6.55** Voice of the UK **7.00** Sunday Breakfast **10.00** Colin Murray **11.45** 5 Live Sport **12.00** 5 Live Sport **2.00pm** Premier League Football **4.00** 5 Live Sport **4.30** Premier League Football **6.30** 606 **8.00** The Wayne Rooney Show **8.30** Football Daily **9.00** Stephen Nolan. The day's main news stories, topical debate and interviews **12.00** Couch to 5K the Podcast **12.30am** Couch to 5K the Podcast **1.00** Edward Adoo **5.00 - 6.00am** Wake Up to Money

CLASSIC FM
FM 99.9-101.9MHZ

7.00am Classic FM Breakfast with Tim Lihoreau **9.00** The Classic FM Hall of Fame Hour with Tim Lihoreau **10.00** Aled Jones **1.00pm** John Brunning **4.00** Stephen Mangan **7.00** Relaxing Evenings with Zeb Soanes **10.00** Calm Classics **1.00am** Bill Overton **4.00 - 6.30am** Early Breakfast

WORLD SERVICE
DIGITAL ONLY

6.00am Weekend **9.00** News **9.06** From Our Own Correspondent **9.30** The Food Chain **10.00** News **10.06** People Fixing the World **10.30** The Fifth Floor **11.00** News **11.30** The Dark Is Rising **11.50** More or Less **12.00** News **12.06pm** BBC OS Conversations **12.30** Assignment **1.00** Newshour **2.00** News **2.06** The Climate Question **2.30** Happy News **3.00** News **3.06** Sportsworld **7.00** The Newsroom **7.30** The Global Jigsaw **8.00** News **8.06** Unexpected Elements **9.00** Newshour **10.00** The Newsroom **10.30** The Fifth Floor **11.00** News **11.06** The Climate Question **11.30** Assignment **12.00** News **12.06am** From Our Own Correspondent **12.30** BBC Inside Science **1.00** The Newsroom **1.30** Discovery **2.00** The Newsroom **2.30** CrowdScience **3.00** News **3.06** People Fixing the World **3.30** The Fifth Floor **4.00** The Newsroom **4.30** The Conversation **5.00 - 8.00am** Newsday

RADIO 4 EXTRA
DIGITAL ONLY

6.00am Desert Island Discs Revisited **6.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **7.00** Poetry Extra: The Black Chair **7.30** Anybody Can Do Anything Omnibus **8.40** Inheritance Tracks **8.50** Ladies of Letters Go Global Omnibus **10.00** Al Read Classics **10.30** Take It from Here **11.00** Desert Island Discs Revisited **11.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **12.00** Poetry Extra: The Black Chair **12.30pm** Anybody Can Do Anything Omnibus **1.40** Inheritance Tracks **1.50** Ladies of Letters Go Global Omnibus **3.00** Al Read Classics **3.30** Take It from Here **4.00** The Coma **4.30** The Slide **5.00** Desert Island Discs Revisited **5.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **6.00** Poetry Extra: The Black Chair **6.30** Anybody Can Do Anything Omnibus **7.40** Inheritance Tracks **7.50** Ladies of Letters Go Global Omnibus **9.00** Al Read Classics **9.30** Take It from Here **10.00** Clare in the Community **10.30** The Nick Revell Show **11.00** In and Out of the Kitchen **11.30** I've Never Seen Star Wars **12.00** The Coma **12.30am** The Slide **1.00** Desert Island Discs Revisited **1.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **2.00** Poetry Extra: The Black Chair **2.30** Anybody Can Do Anything Omnibus **3.40** Inheritance Tracks **3.50** Ladies of Letters Go Global Omnibus **5.00** Al Read Classics **5.30 - 6.00am** Take It from Here

Today's television

FV Freeview FS Freesat (AD) Audio description (R) Repeat (S) Subtitles (SL) In-vision signing

Channel 4

6.15 **am** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **6.40** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **7.05** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **7.30** Everybody Loves Raymond (AD) (R) (S) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond (AD) (R) (S) **8.25** Everybody Loves Raymond (AD) (R) (S) **9.00** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **9.30** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **10.00** Sunday Brunch (S)
1.00 pm The Simpsons (AD) (R) (S)
1.30 The Simpsons (AD) (R) (S)
2.00 A Place in the Sun (R) (S)
3.00 Location, Location, Location (R) (S)
4.05 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces (AD) (R) (S)
5.05 Bargain Holiday Secrets (AD) (S)
6.10 Channel 4 News (S)
6.40 The Dog House (AD) (R) (S)

Secret Genius

7.45 The Great Pottery Throw Down Siobhán McSweeney hosts the semi-final (AD) (S)

9.00 Secret Genius Alan Carr and Susie Dent host the grand final. Last in the series (AD) (S)

10.00 Fires of the Moon Welsh-language opera film, inspired by Caradog Prichard's novel Un Nos Ola Leuad (AD) (S)
11.30 FILM: The Great Wall (2016) **1.10am** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **2.00** The Simpsons **2.25** The Simpsons **2.50** The Simpsons **3.15** The Simpsons **3.45** Kirstie's House of Craft **3.55** Couples Come Dine with Me **4.50** Location, Location, Location **5.45 - 6.25am** Countdown

Channel 5

6.00 **am** Milkshake! **9.00** Entertainment News on 5 (S) **9.10** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun (R) (S) **10.05** Malta: The Jewel of the Med (R) (S) **11.05** Malta: The Jewel of the Med (R) (S)
12.00 Cruising with Jane McDonald (R) (S)
1.00 pm Cruising with Jane McDonald (R) (S)
2.05 Inside the Tower of London (R) (S)
3.00 Inside the Tower of London (R) (S)
4.00 The Great Stink of 1858 (R) (S)
6.00 5 News Weekend (S)
6.05 Celebrity Puzzling (R) (S)

22 Kids & Counting

7.00 Romance Scams: Don't Get Caught Out Fraudsters who exploit people's desire for love and friendship (S)

8.00 22 Kids & Counting Max prepares for his GCSEs (S)

9.00 Rich House, Poor House Two entrepreneurs swap with a couple struggling financially (S)

10.30 World's Most Expensive Cruise (R) **11.35** Police Interceptors **12.40am** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun **1.00** Cruise TV **2.00** Teleshopping **2.30** Friends **2.55** Charles & the Women Who Could Have Been Queen **3.45** Save Money on Your Supermarket Shop **4.35** Paul Martin's Antiques Showdown **5.25** Entertainment News on 5 **5.35** The Adventures of Paddington **5.45 - 6.00am** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom

Sky Arts

FV 36 FS 143 SKY 130 VIRGIN 123

6.00 **am** Bagpipes: A Celebration (AD) (S) **7.00** Nicola Benedetti & Friends (S) **8.30** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) (S) **9.00** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) (S) **9.35** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) (S) **10.10** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) (S) **10.45** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour (S) **11.45** Landscape Artist of the Year 2026 (AD) (S)
12.45 pm Riverdance 25th Anniversary Show (S)
2.45 Rod Stewart: It Had to Be You (S)
4.45 Fleetwood Mac: Live in Boston (S)
5.45 Fleetwood Mac: Live in Boston (S)

Cirque du Soleil: Varekai

7.00 Cirque du Soleil: Varekai The circus company tells the story of Icarus, whose wings melt when he flies to close to the sun, sending him crashing into the volcanic and mysterious world of Varekai (S)

9.00 Elvis '56 Special Following a pivotal year in Elvis Presley's career (AD) (S)

10.20 Chuck Berry: The King of Rock n' Roll Documentary about the legendary musician (S)
12.10 am Opry Live **1.10** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **1.40** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **2.10** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **2.40** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **3.10** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **3.35** Dolly Parton: Song by Song **4.00** Johnny Cash: The Man in Black in Britain **5.00 - 6.00am** Classic Albums

U&Drama

FV 20 FS 158 SKY 143 VIRGIN 116

6.00 **am** Teleshopping **7.00** Sister Boniface Mysteries (AD) (S) **7.50** The Bill (S) **8.50** The Bill (S) **9.50** The Bill (S) **10.50** The Bill (S) **11.50** The Bill (S)
12.50 pm Call the Midwife (AD) (S)
2.05 Call the Midwife (AD) (S)
3.25 Catherine Cookson's The Secret (S)
6.40 Last Tango in Halifax (AD) (S)

Silent Witness

8.00 Sister Boniface Mysteries During a weekend away with the sisters, a former colleague of Sister Reg is found dead (AD) (S)

9.00 Silent Witness A nanny is killed in a botched assassination attempt (AD) (S)

11.20 New Tricks **12.40am** Call the Midwife **2.00** A Small Light **3.00** Copper **4.00 - 6.00am** Teleshopping

Talking Pictures TV

FV 82 FS 306 SKY 328 VIRGIN 445

6.00 **am** FILM: Dick Tracy's G-Men (1939, b/w) Detective thriller starring Ralph Byrd and Jennifer Jones (S) **8.10** FILM: Spaceways (1953, b/w) Sci-fi murder mystery starring Howard Duff (S) **9.45** FILM: Tarzan and the Green Goddess (1938, b/w) Action adventure starring Bruce Bennett (S) **11.05** The Beverly Hillbillies (S) **11.35** FILM: Jack the Giant Killer (1962) Fantasy adventure starring Kerwin Matthews (S)
1.25 pm Batman (S)
1.55 FILM: The Calendar (1948, b/w) Drama starring Greta Gynt (S)
3.30 Give Us a Clue (S)
4.00 The Man from UNCLE (S)
5.00 The Footage Detectives (S)
6.00 Hannay (S)

The Man from UNCLE

7.00 That's My Boy Ida agrees to look after her brother's grandchild (S)

7.30 The Vise Two business partners plot a murder to avoid prosecution

8.00 Sergeant Cork A kindly priest puts his life on the line to help the desperate

9.05 Who Do You Do? (S)

9.40 FILM: Confessions of a Pop Performer (1975) Comedy starring Robin Askwith

11.25 FILM: The Black Hole (1979) Sci-fi adventure starring Maximilian Schell **1.20am** The Heritage Chart Show **2.25** Burke's Law **3.25** The Rogues **4.25** The Adventures of Robin Hood **4.55** The Buccaneers **5.25** The Adventures of William Tell **5.55 - 6.00am** Cinebox Memories

Film4

FV 14 FS 300 SKY 313 VIRGIN 428

11.00 **am** FILM: The Major and the Minor (1942, b/w) Romantic comedy starring Ginger Rogers and Ray Milland (AD) (S)
1.05 pm FILM: First Knight (1995) Arthurian adventure starring Richard Gere (AD) (S)
3.45 FILM: Jumanji: The Next Level (2019) Fantasy adventure sequel starring Dwayne Johnson (AD) (S)

Bridge of Spies

6.05 FILM: Bridge of Spies (2015) A lawyer is hired to defend a Soviet spy, an assignment that leads to a prisoner exchange. Steven Spielberg's fact-based Cold War drama with Tom Hanks and Mark Rylance (AD) (S)

9.00 FILM: Déjà Vu (2006) A federal agent uses a top-secret device that allows him to see into the past to prevent a bombing taking place. Sci-fi thriller starring Denzel Washington and Paula Patton (AD) (S)

11.25 FILM: Ambulance (2022) Crime drama starring Jake Gyllenhaal **2.10 - 3.55am** FILM: Fire Will Come (2019) Crime drama starring Amador Arias

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FV Freeview FS Freesat (AD) Audio description (R) Repeat (S) Subtitles (SL) In-vision signing

BBC Four

FV 9 FS 173 SKY 116 VIRGIN 108

7.00 **pm** Travels with Pevsner
7.50 Britain's Wild Places: Shearwater Island
8.00 Eurovision Classical Concerts
9.00 British History's Biggest Fibs with Lucy Worsley. The government's coup to take over the rule of India from the East India Company. Last in the series
10.00 Making of Lord of the Flies
11.00 The Lady from the Sea
12.40 **am** The Australian Wars
1.40 Travels with Pevsner
2.30 **- 3.30am** British History's Biggest Fibs with Lucy Worsley

ITV3

FV 10 FS 115 SKY 119 VIRGIN 117

10.10 **am** Endeavour
12.05 **pm** Doc Martin
1.05 Doc Martin
2.05 Rosemary & Thyme
4.05 McDonald & Dodds
6.00 Agatha Christie's Marple. A murderer strikes at a strange country house
8.00 Midsomer Murders. An undertaker is found murdered
10.00 Vera. A murder victim's estranged family complicate the investigation
11.50 The Lady
12.50 **am** The Lady
1.50 On the Buses
2.20 Unwind with ITV
2.30 **- 6.00am** Teleshopping

ITV4

FV 26 FS 117 SKY 120 VIRGIN 118

11.35 **am** Ninja Warrior UK
12.30 **pm** Aussie Pickers
1.30 **FILM:** Smokey and the Bandit II (1980)
3.35 **FILM:** Diamonds Are Forever (1971)
6.00 NHL: Pittsburgh v Las Vegas
8.30 Made in Britain
9.00 World of Sport
9.10 Nine Dart Finishes
9.20 Nijinsky's Triple Crown
9.30 River Monsters
10.00 Black Sails
11.20 Black Sails
12.20 **am** Shardlake
1.20 Minder
2.15 Lost Car Rescue
3.00 Teleshopping
3.30 **- 4.00am** Auto Mundial

More4

FV 18 FS 124 SKY 136 VIRGIN 147

Noon A Place in the Sun
12.30 **pm** Come Dine with Me
3.05 A Place in the Sun
4.10 Kirstie and Phil's Love It or List It
5.15 Location, Location, Location
6.20 Four in a Bed
6.55 Four in a Bed
7.25 Four in a Bed
7.55 Four in a Bed
8.30 Four in a Bed
9.00 999: On the Front Line
10.00 24 Hours in A&E
12.05 **am** 999: On the Front Line
1.10 24 Hours in A&E
3.20 Supermarkets Unwrapped: The Freezer Aisle
3.50 **- 6.00am** Shopping: Discover Must Have Ideas

U&Gold

SKY 110 VIRGIN 124

10.20 **am** Only Fools and Horses
8.10 **pm** Dad's Army
8.50 Victoria Wood as Seen on TV
9.30 dinnerladies. Bren gets excited about her holiday
10.10 Victoria Wood as Seen on TV. There are two shock departures from Acorn Antiques
10.55 Only Fools and Horses
11.35 Only Fools and Horses
12.15 **am** Only Fools and Horses
12.55 Only Fools and Horses
1.35 Only Fools and Horses
2.20 dinnerladies
2.55 Victoria Wood as Seen on TV
3.30 **- 4.00am** Only Fools and Horses

U&Yesterday

FV 27 FS 159 SKY 155 VIRGIN 129

Noon Frozen Planet
1.00 **pm** Frozen Planet
2.00 Frozen Planet
3.00 Frozen Planet
4.00 Frozen Planet
5.00 Frozen Planet
6.00 Frozen Planet
7.00 Canal Boat Diaries
8.00 Canal Boat Diaries
9.00 Classic Car Kings
10.00 Bangers & Cash
11.00 Bangers & Cash
12.00 Bangers & Cash
1.00 **am** Bangers & Cash
2.00 Bangers & Cash
3.00 **- 6.10am** Teleshopping

Sky Atlantic

SKY 108

11.55 **am** Game of Thrones
1.20 **pm** Game of Thrones
2.45 Game of Thrones
3.50 Game of Thrones
4.55 Game of Thrones. A weary Ned struggles to deal with the politics of the king's court
6.00 Game of Thrones. Ned searches for the truth about Jon Arryn's death
7.00 A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms
10.55 Task
12.00 Game of Thrones
1.00 **am** Game of Thrones
2.00 DTF St Louis
3.00 **- 4.00am** Game of Thrones

U&Dave

11.20am Top Gear **1.25pm** Richard Osman's House of Games **2.40** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **4.40** Greece with Simon Reeve **5.40** Turkey with Simon Reeve **6.40** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **8.00** Will & Ralf Should Know Better. The pair take hobby-hunting to extremes **9.00** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **10.00** QI **10.40** Mock the Week **12.00** Live at the Apollo **1.00am** QI XL **2.00-4.00am** Schitt's Creek

ITV2

11.50am Deal or No Deal **12.50pm** Celebrity Catchphrase **1.50** Wheel of Fortune **2.50 FILM:** Trolls Band Together (2023) Premiere. Animated musical, featuring the voices of Anna Kendrick and Justin Timberlake **4.45** Britain's Got Talent **6.00** Britain's Got Talent: Unseen **6.25 FILM:** Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom (2018) While trying to protect genetically engineered dinosaurs, Owen Grady and Claire Dearing uncover a conspiracy. Action sequel starring Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard **9.00** The Heat. A flirtatious new chef joins the kitchen **10.00** Family Guy **11.35** American Dad! **12.35am** The Heat **1.35** Plebs **2.05** Deep Fake Neighbour Wars **2.35** Unwind with ITV **3.00-6.00am** Teleshopping

Challenge

Noon Celebrity Catchphrase **1.00pm** Tenable **2.00** Lily Savage's Blankety Blank **4.00** The Chase **5.00** The Chase Celebrity Special **7.00** The Chase **9.00** The Chase Celebrity Special. With Edwina Currie, Rachel Riley, Keith Duffy and Mark Charnock **10.00** The Chase **11.00** Bullseye **2.00-4.00am** The Chase

Quest

Noon Antiques Road Trip **2.00pm** The Repair Shop **5.00** The Yorkshire Auction House **7.00** Celebrity Yorkshire Auction House. Angus foxtrots into Oti Mabuse's glitzy home and faces a fridge freezer first **8.00** The Repair Shop **1.00am** Massive Engineering Mistakes **2.00-4.00am** Destroyed in Seconds

Discovery

Noon Alaska: Homestead Rescue **7.00pm** Moonshiners **9.00** Barnwood Builders. The O'Dell Cabin finds a home in Texas to match a client's favourite painting **10.00** Wheeler Dealers. Mike has gone all nostalgic, buying a 58-year-old Dormobile campervan **11.00** Kindig Customs. Dave and Kev are back East **12.00** Overhaulin' **3.00-5.00am** Street Outlaws: Memphis

PBS America

11.55am Besieged Fortresses, Legendary Battles **1.00pm** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Mafia's Greatest Hits **3.50** Besieged Fortresses, Legendary Battles **8.20** Pandemic – The Flu That Killed 50 Million. Docu-drama about the 1918 Flu pandemic **9.35** America's Great War 1917-1918. The stories of US soldiers who fought in the First World War **10.45** Pandemic – The Flu That Killed 50 Million **12.00** America's Great War 1917-1918 **1.15am** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.00-6.00am** Teleshopping

Sky History

Noon Pawn Stars **2.00pm** Secrets in the Ice **8.00** The Sumatran Monster. A primate-like creature known as the Orang Pendek, or Forest Man **9.00** Field of Vampires **11.00** History's Deadliest With Ving Rhames **12.00** The UnBelievable with Dan Aykroyd **1.00-6.00am** Secrets in the Ice

Sky Documentaries

11.00am FILM: Wig (2019) **12.50pm** My Icon: Pam Cookey **1.00 FILM:** Dave Not Coming Back (2020) Two divers' efforts to retrieve a dead body from a freshwater cave **3.00** Lance **7.00 FILM:** I Am Burt Reynolds (2020) Family and friends pay tribute to the iconic Hollywood actor **8.50** My Icon: Linford Christie **9.00 FILM:** Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief (2015) Documentary looking at the history of the Church of Scientology's leaders **11.20-4.00am** The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling

Sky One

Noon Police 24/7 **3.00pm** The Simpsons **5.00** Rob & Romesh vs Hollywood Stunts **6.00** Rob & Romesh vs Bollywood **7.00 FILM:** The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012) Fantasy adventure starring Martin Freeman and Ian McKellen **10.00** Saturday Night Live **11.30** John Bishop 25 Tour: Live from Dublin **1.15am** The Force: Manchester **3.15-4.10am** Brit Cops: Frontline Crime UK

Great! Mystery

Noon Murder, She Wrote **9.00pm FILM:** A Gourmet Detective Mystery: Eat, Drink and Be Buried (2017) Whodunit starring Dylan Neal and Brooke Burns **9.56** Good News on GREAT! **10.01 FILM:** A Gourmet Detective Mystery: Eat, Drink and Be Buried (2017) Whodunit starring Dylan Neal and Brooke Burns **10.55 FILM:** The Gourmet Detective: Roux the Day (2020) Crime drama starring Dylan Neal **11.51** Good News on GREAT!

11.56 FILM: The Gourmet Detective: Roux the Day (2020) Crime drama starring Dylan Neal **12.50am FILM:** Killer Cover Up (2021) **2.30-4.00am FILM:** Killer in Law (2019)

Sky Cinema Premiere

11.15am Jurassic World: Rebirth (2025) Fantasy adventure starring Scarlett Johansson **1.35pm** King Ivory (2024) Thriller starring James Badge Dale **3.45** I Know What You Did Last Summer (2025) Horror reboot starring Madelyn Cline **5.45** How to Train Your Dragon (2025) Fantasy adventure starring Mason Thames **8.00** Jurassic World: Rebirth (2025) A crack team infiltrates a forbidden island to collect the DNA of three key dinosaur species. Fantasy adventure starring Scarlett Johansson **10.20** Bring Her Back (2025) A brother and sister uncover a terrifying ritual at the secluded home of their new foster mother. Thriller starring Billy Barratt **12.10am** Plainclothes (2025) **1.55** I Know What You Did Last Summer (2025) **3.55-6.00am** M3GAN 2.0 (2025)

Sky Sports Main Event

11.00am Live SPFL. Rangers v Celtic (kick-off 12.00pm) **2.00pm** Live Premier League. Manchester United v Crystal Palace (kick-off 2.00pm) **4.00** Live Super Sunday. Arsenal v Chelsea (kick-off 4.30pm) **7.30** Live PGA Tour Golf. The Cognizant Classic **11.00** Sky Sports Catch Up **12.00** Live NBA Basketball **3.30-6.00am** Sky Sports Catch Up

Sky Sports Premier League

Noon Super Sunday Matchday **12.30pm** Live Premier League. Manchester United v Crystal Palace (kick-off 2.00pm) **4.25** Live Super Sunday. Arsenal v Chelsea (kick-off 4.30pm) **7.30** Super Sunday: Extra Time **8.30** James Milner: Record Breaker **9.00** Transfer 360 **9.30** SNF **10.00** Premier League Highlights **2.00am** Transfer 360 **3.00-4.00am** PL Greatest Games

TNT Sports 1

11.15am Winter Olympic Games **12.15pm** Premier League – The Big Interview **12.45** Live: Welsh Open Snooker. Coverage from the final on the seventh day of the tournament **4.00** Ultimate Pool **5.30** Crouchy and Cole **5.45** MotoGP **6.45** Live: Welsh Open Snooker. Further coverage from the final on the seventh day of the tournament **10.00** UFC **1.00am** UFC Main Event **2.00** TNT Sports Reload **2.30** Women's Alpine Skiing World Cup **3.00** Men's Alpine Skiing World Cup **3.30-4.30am** Ski Jumping World Cup

BBC News

Noon BBC News **1.30pm** Tech Now **2.00** BBC News **2.30** The Big Cases **3.00** BBC News **4.30** Global Eye **5.00** BBC News **8.30** Newscast **9.00** BBC News **11.30** Global Eye **12.00** BBC News **12.30am** The Media Show **1.00** BBC News **1.30** The Big Cases **2.00** Newsday **2.30** Business Today **2.45** BBC Sport **3.00** Newsday **3.30** Business Today **3.45-4.00am** BBC Sport

GB News

11.00am Sunday with Michael Portillo **1.00pm** The Weekend **3.00** Nana Akua **6.00** The Camilla Tominey Show **7.00** Free Speech Nation **9.00** Alex Armstrong Tonight **11.00** Alex Armstrong Tonight Late Edition **12.00** The Late Show Live **2.00am** The Camilla Tominey Show **3.00-5.00am** Alex Armstrong Tonight

Sky News

Noon Sky News **1.30pm** Trevor Phillips: Highlights **2.00** Sky News: Today **4.30** Trevor Phillips: Highlights **5.00** Sky News **7.30** Trevor Phillips: Highlights **8.00** Sky News **8.30** UK Tonight Highlights **9.00** Sky News **9.30** The World with Yalda Hakim **10.00** The Wrap with Gillian Joseph **12.00-6.00am** Sky News

Variations

Northern Ireland

BBC One: 10.00 - 10.30am Sunday Politics **7.00 - 8.00pm** Story and Song: 180 Years of Queen's
BBC Two: 10.00pm Cumasc: Seisiúin sa Black Gate **11.00** Sunday Politics **11.30 - 11.45pm** The Chronicles of Strangford Shorts
UTV: No variations

Scotland

BBC One: 10.00 - 10.30am The Sunday Show **11.45pm** Sportscene: Premiership Highlights **12.45am** The Graham Norton Show **1.35 - 6.00am** BBC News
BBC Scotland: 7.00pm Reporting Scotland **7.15** Sportscene: Premiership Highlights **8.15** The Repair Shop on the Road **9.00** Paramedics on Scene **10.00** Still Game **10.30** Scot Squad **11.00** Situationships with Sophie and Christine **11.30** The Sunday Show **midnight** Close
STV: 4.00 - 5.05am Unwind with STV

Wales

BBC One: 10.00 - 10.30am Politics Wales **1.00pm** Live Snooker **4.30** Nigel Slater's Simple Cooking **4.35** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back **5.05 - 5.35** Bear Grylls: Wild Reckoning **7.00** Mike Bubbins: Welsh Learner **7.50 - 8.00pm** Best of Weatherman Walking
BBC Two: 12.10pm Nigel Slater's Dish of the Day **12.15 - 1.00** The Vintage French Farmhouse **1.15** Songs of Praise **1.50** Lifeline **2.00** Escape to the Country **2.35** Earth **3.35** FILM: Spider-Man 2 (2004) **5.30** Villages by the Sea **6.00** SOS: Extreme Rescues **6.30** Weatherman Walking **7.00** Live Snooker **10.00** Forensics: The Real CSI **11.00** St David's Day: Calan in Concert **12.00** Big Cats 24/7 **1.00 - 1.15am** Coast
ITV1 Wales: No variations

ITV1 Regions

No variations

S4C

6.00am Cyw **9.00** Am Dro! **10.00** Cynefin **11.00** Arfordir Cymru: Llyn **11.30** Dechrau Canu Dechrau Canmol **12.00** Sgwrs Dan y Lloer **12.30pm** Y Deis **1.00** Y Fets **2.00** Antur y Gorllewin **3.00** Sgwrs Dan y Lloer **3.45** Ffermio **4.20** Clwb Rygbi **6.05** Pobol y Cwm Omnibws **7.15** Newyddion a Chwaraeon **7.30** Dechrau Canu Dechrau Canmol **8.30** Neges Olaf Mike Peters **9.00** Tanau'r Lloer **10.30 - 11.35pm** Radio Fa'ma

Weather & Crosswords

Forecast

General situation

Breezy with rainy periods across the United Kingdom today. Rain ends in the morning in southeast England. Windy along the west coast of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

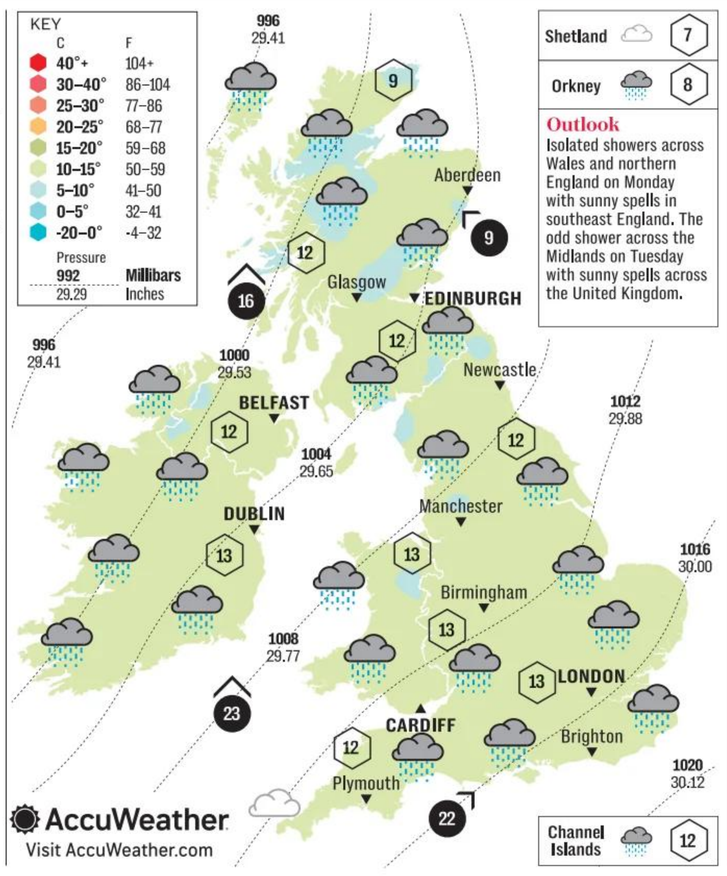
◆**London, Cent S England, Channel Is, SW England, E England, SE England, E Anglia, Midlands:** Mostly cloudy with morning rain today. Max 51-55F (11-13C). A gentle S wind. Cloudy early tonight with clear spells later during the night. Min 43-46F (6-8C).

◆**NW England, Lake Dist, IoM, Cent N England, NE England:** Breezy with morning rain today. Max 40-56F (4-13C). A moderate to fresh S wind. Showery spells early tonight. Min 36-49F (2-9C).

◆**Wales:** Breezy with rainy spells today and tonight. Max 39-54F (4-12C). A moderate S wind. Min 36-49F (2-9C).

◆**N Ireland:** Windy with showery spells today and tonight. Max 42-55F (6-13C). A fresh S wind. Min 32-42F (0-6C).

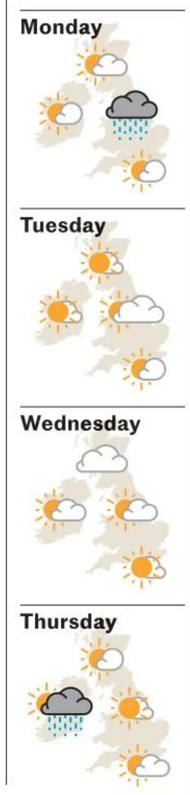
◆**SW Scotland, NW Scotland, Glasgow, Cent Highlands, Argyll, W Isles, SE Scotland, NE Scotland, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Moray Firth, Orkney, Shetland:** Windy with rainy periods today and tonight, some wintry. Max 36-53F (2-12C). A moderate to fresh S wind. Min 29-46F (-2 to 8C).



Shetland 7
Orkney 8

Outlook
Isolated showers across Wales and northern England on Monday with sunny spells in southeast England. The odd shower across the Midlands on Tuesday with sunny spells across the United Kingdom.

Four day forecast



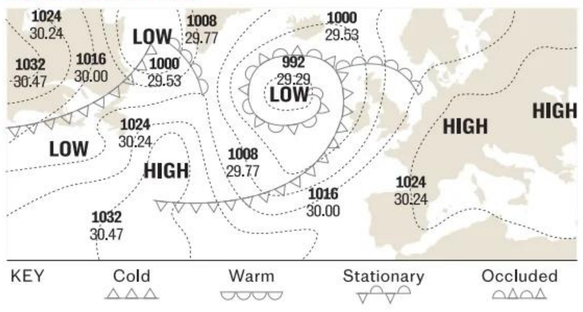
European readings Last night's report for 24 hours to 6pm

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Akrotiri	16	6	p/cldy
Alicante	18	10	p/cldy
Amsterdam	11	7	showers
Athens	14	6	p/cldy
Barcelona	15	10	cloudy
Bari	16	6	p/cldy
Belgrade	15	1	sunny
Benidorm	17	11	p/cldy
Bergen	6	-1	p/cldy
Berlin	19	7	sunny
Biarritz	13	9	showers
Bodrum	16	6	sunny
Bordeaux	15	8	p/cldy
Brest	11	5	p/cldy
Brussels	11	9	showers
Bucharest	6	-2	p/cldy
Budapest	14	-3	sunny
Cagliari	18	8	p/cldy
Chamonix	12	1	p/cldy
Copenhagen	9	5	rain
Corfu	17	9	p/cldy
Cork	9	0	showers
Corsica	17	7	p/cldy
Crete	13	10	p/cldy
Dublin	9	0	showers
Dubrovnik	17	2	sunny
Faro	19	10	sunny
Florence	17	8	p/cldy
Frankfurt	15	3	windy
Funchal	18	14	cloudy
Gdansk	15	3	haze
Geneva	12	4	p/cldy
Gibraltar	17	11	p/cldy
Hamburg	14	9	showers
Helsinki	5	1	rain
Innsbruck	17	0	sunny
Istanbul	7	4	showers
Kyiv	4	-6	p/cldy
La Rochelle	13	7	p/cldy
Lisbon	15	9	windy
Locarno	14	-1	p/cldy
Luxembourg	11	8	showers
Madrid	17	6	p/cldy
Majorca	18	10	cloudy
Malaga	18	8	p/cldy
Malta	18	11	p/cldy
Marseille	16	7	cloudy
Menorca	14	10	cloudy
Milan	15	5	p/cldy
Monaco	16	9	p/cldy
Moscow	1	-1	ice
Munich	16	0	sunny
Naples	17	11	p/cldy
Nice	17	10	p/cldy
Nicosia	15	2	sunny
Oporto	15	5	p/cldy
Oslo	2	-3	showers
Palermo	18	11	sunny
Paris	14	8	p/cldy
Perpignan	15	11	cloudy
Prague	15	0	p/cldy
Reykjavik	1	-3	snow
Rhodes	15	9	sunny
Riga	10	4	rain
Rome	16	9	haze
Saint Malo	13	6	p/cldy
Salzburg	17	0	sunny
Santander	12	8	showers
Santiago/Comp.	11	2	p/cldy
Sofia	13	-3	sunny
St. Petersburg	3	1	showers
Stockholm	5	1	cloudy
Strasbourg	13	5	p/cldy
Tenerife	21	17	showers
Tirana	20	5	sunny
Toulouse	12	8	rain
Valencia	14	10	cloudy
Venice	13	6	cloudy
Vienna	16	3	windy
Vigo	18	4	p/cldy
Vilnius	12	-1	haze
Warsaw	16	0	haze
Zagreb	18	0	haze
Zurich	11	3	p/cldy

British readings Last night's report for 24 hours to 4pm - *estimated readings

	Sun hrs	Rain in	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Aberdeen	7.3	0.00	9	-3	p/cloudy
Aberystwyth	2.9*	0.00	9	3	p/cloudy
Antrim	5.8	0.01	8	0	showers
Aviemore	6.0	0.01	7	-6	p/cloudy
Barnstaple	1.4*	0.41	11	7	cloudy
Barrow-in-Furns.	1.1*	0.03	9	4	showers
Basingstoke	2.7	0.13	12	6	p/cloudy
Bedford	0.4*	0.29	14	6	rain
Belfast	8.7*	0.00	9*	0*	sunny
Berwick	0.0	0.05	10	4	showers
Birmingham	1.4*	0.49	9	6	showers
Bodmin	1.3*	0.28	11	4	cloudy
Bournemouth	5.0	0.05	13	7	p/cloudy
Braintree	0.0*	0.21	13	6	rain
Brecon	1.6*	0.32	8	3	showers
Bridlington	0.0*	0.33	11	6	rain
Brighton	0.1*	0.11	12	7	cloudy
Bristol	1.2*	0.00	12*	7*	cloudy
Camborne	4.0	0.36	10	7	p/cloudy
Cardiff	6.1	0.22	11	5	p/cloudy
Carlisle	0.0*	0.06	10	4	showers
Catterick	0.0	0.04	11	6	showers
Cheltenham	0.9*	0.38	10*	6*	cloudy
Chester	2.1	0.09	10	6	cloudy
Coventry	0.0*	0.45	11*	6*	rain
Doncaster	0.0*	0.42	9*	6*	showers
Dover	0.0*	0.14	11	7	rain
Dundee	0.5	0.08	11	3	showers
Eastbourne	2.6	0.14	12	7	rain
Edinburgh	0.2	0.06	10	2	showers
Epsom	0.0*	0.16	11	5	rain
Falmouth	3.2*	0.01	11	6	p/cloudy
Farnborough	0.0*	0.14	12*	6*	cloudy
Fort William	3.9	0.00	7	-7	p/cloudy
Glasgow	1.2	0.03	9	3	cloudy
Great Malvern	1.1*	0.61	11	6	cloudy
Grimsby	0.0*	0.55	8	6	rain
Guernsey	1.6*	0.09	13	8	cloudy
Hereford	1.5*	0.20	10	6	cloudy
High Wycombe	0.0*	0.30	12*	6*	rain
Holyhead	5.1	0.00	9	4	p/cloudy
Huddersfield	0.0*	0.06	8	4	showers
Ipswich	0.1	0.09	12	6	showers
Isle of Man	6.1	0.00	9	5	p/cloudy
Isle of Skye	6.8*	0.00	6*	0*	p/cloudy
Isle of Wight	1.4*	0.04	11	8	windy
Isles of Scilly	0.0*	0.08	12	7	cloudy
Jersey	5.3	0.01	13	8	p/cloudy
Keswick	0.0*	0.02	10	3	showers
Kew Gardens	0.0*	0.21	13*	7*	rain
King's Lynn	0.0*	0.43	14	7	rain
Leeds	0.0*	0.25	10*	5*	cloudy
Leek	0.0*	0.53	8	4	showers
Leominster	5.1	0.17	9	6	p/cloudy
Lincoln	0.7	0.62	9	6	rain
Liverpool	2.1	0.09	10	6	showers
London	0.9	0.19	13	7	rain
Manchester	0.3	0.13	11	5	showers
Middlesbrough	0.1*	0.02	9	5	showers
Newcastle	2.1*	0.04	11	3	showers
Newquay	4.0	0.36	10	7	p/cloudy
Nottingham	0.7	0.78	9	6	rain
Orkney	7.2	0.01	8	2	p/cloudy
Oxford	2.3	0.38	15	6	rain
Perth	0.8*	0.03	11	2	showers
Peterborough	1.0	0.48	14	6	showers
Plymouth	3.6*	0.07	12	7	p/cloudy
Portsmouth*	0.3*	0.16*	12*	8*	rain
Prestwick	3.2	0.00	10	2	p/cloudy
Ramsgate	0.0*	0.19	11*	7*	rain
Rhyl	0.0*	0.01	9	6	cloudy
Rugby	0.0*	0.33	12	5	rain
Salisbury	0.5*	0.17	12	6	cloudy
Scunthorpe	0.0*	0.75	10*	6*	rain
Sheffield	0.0	0.62	9	6	showers
Shetland	6.6*	0.03	8	1	p/cloudy
Shrewsbury	1.1	0.38	10	6	showers
Skegness	0.6*	0.46	12	6	rain
Southampton	0.9*	0.44	12*	7*	cloudy
Southend-on-Sea	0.7	0.15	12	7	rain
Stockport	0.3	0.13	11	5	showers
Stornoway	6.2	0.02	7	0	p/cloudy
Swansea	2.2*	0.00	9*	6*	cloudy
Swindon	0.8*	0.00	12	6	cloudy
Thirsk	0.0*	0.20	12	6	showers
Tiree	5.4	0.02	8	1	showers
Weymouth	2.1*	0.12	12	8	cloudy
Whitehaven	3.4*	0.04	8	3	showers
Windermere	0.3*	0.09	8*	3*	showers
Worcester	0.2*	0.61	11	6	cloudy
Yeovil	5.0	0.08	13	6	p/cloudy
York	0.0*	0.29	10*	6*	showers

Atlantic front



Noon today: A front will bring rain to the United Kingdom. Largely dry in southern and eastern Europe.

Last week's extremes

	UK	Europe
Warmest	Northolt, Wed 18.3C (64.9F)	San Sebastian (Spain), Wed 27.8C (82.0F)
Coldest	Cairngorm Mtn.s, Fri -9.4C (15.1F)	Suolovuopmi Lulit (Norway), Tues -35.0C (-31.0F)
Wettest	Capel Curig, Fri 1.25in.	Tbilisi (Georgia), Mon 3.07in.

Facts & figures

Temperature (C)	Last week	Last month	Last year
London	11.1	7.9	6.7
Manchester	9.9	6.3	5.2
Edinburgh	9.6	5.5	4.3
Belfast	9.1	5.9	5.3

Rainfall (ins)	Last week	Last month	Last year
London	0.21	4.18	7.55
Manchester	2.25	5.58	12.41
Edinburgh	0.41	1.79	4.07
Belfast	0.48	5.53	8.36

Sunshine (hrs)	Last week	Last month	Last year
London	13.3	65.9	104.2
Manchester	18.6	87.6	146.5
Edinburgh	16.1	48.1	91.6
Belfast	6.8	50.2	74.7

Sun & moon (Greenwich)

Sun rises	0647
Sun sets	1742
Moon rises	1517
Moon sets	0612
Full moon	Mar 3

Lighting up

Aberdeen	1741 to 0700
Belfast	1801 to 0712
Birmingham	1747 to 0652
London	1742 to 0645
Manchester	1747 to 0655
Penzance	1804 to 0704

Sea forecast

S North Sea: A fresh to near gale south-southwesterly wind today. Seas will be slight. Visibility will be fair.

Dover Strait, English Channel: A moderate to strong southwesterly wind today. Seas will be rough on the east and will be slight on the west. Visibility will be fair.

St. George's Channel: A strong to gale south-southwesterly wind today. Seas will be moderate. Visibility will be fair.

Irish Sea: A strong to gale southerly wind today. Seas will be moderate. Visibility will be fair.

High water

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Aberdeen	--	--	1159	4.0m
Belfast	0933	3.3m	2212	3.1m
Cardiff	0528	10.6m	1759	11.0m
Dover	0958	6.0m	2214	6.2m
Falmouth	0333	4.6m	1606	4.5m
Harwich	1008	3.7m	2231	3.6m
Holyhead	0854	5.2m	2126	5.2m
Hull	0441	6.6m	1651	6.9m
Liverpool	0941	8.7m	2212	8.8m
London	--	--	1224	6.5m
Portsmouth	0947	4.2m	2227	4.4m
Southampton	0852	4.1m	1515	1.0m

Weather notes

The South and East will see plenty of sun tomorrow – unlike the North and West

It's the first day of Spring, but no one told the weather

By **Peter Stanford**

IF YOU were tempted to think spring had arrived on Wednesday when the mercury shot up to 18.7C (65.6F) in south west London, then think again. It didn't last but, since today is not only St David's Day but also the first day of meteorological spring, at least we are heading in the right direction.

The recent run of areas of low pressure rolling in from the Atlantic with mild south-westerly winds continues this morning. But, as is their way, they come with lashings of rain. It will fall first in south-west counties of England and South Wales, then over all of southern England and by afternoon will be giving East Anglia a drenching. In northern and western parts, it should be a much drier day, but the wind will get stronger especially in coastal parts anywhere from Wales, through Northern Ireland and up into Scotland. Everywhere south of the line between the Mersey in the west and the Humber in the east is looking at 12C (54F).

North of it, expect 11C (52F), until you reach the northern parts of Scotland where it will be more like 9C (48F). As tomorrow dawns, the divide will be more north and west as against south and east. The latter will see plenty of warm sunshine early on, pushing temperatures back up to 14C (57F). But over in the west, a band of rain will dampen things down before petering out, while in the north the benign influence of those south-westerly winds is displaced by something cooler heading down from the Arctic.

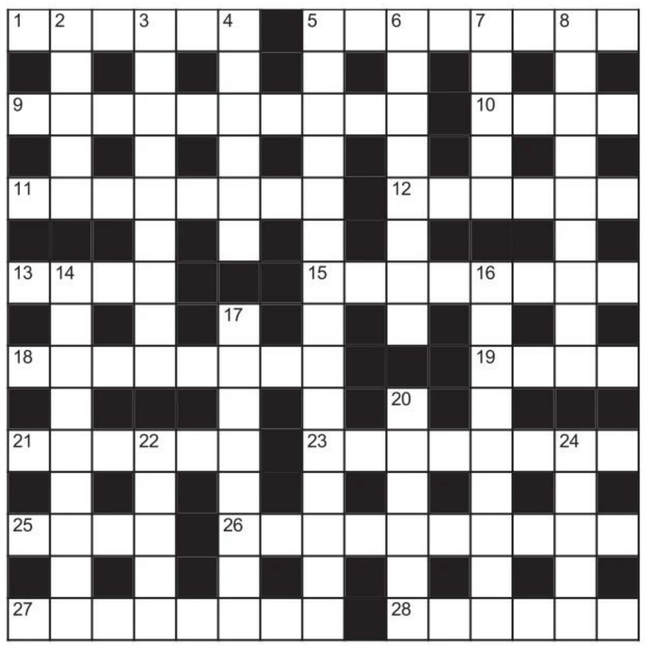
That pattern continues through the rest of the week, though towards next weekend, high pressure is likely to build in and calm things down. *

World readings

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Accra	33	27	p/cldy
Addis Ababa	29	12	p/cldy
Adelaide	30	21	showers
Alexandria	17	9	p/cldy
Algiers	24	7	p/cldy
Amman	11	3	p/cldy
Anchorage	-18	-23	haze
Ankara	7	-4	p/cldy
Ascension Is.	31	25	p/cldy
Auckland	22	16	showers
Baghdad	18	7	sunny
Bahamas	27	21	sunny
Bahrain	24	20	sunny
Bamako	33	23	p/cldy
Bangkok	35	26	showers
Beijing	3	-1	cloudy
Beirut	16	4	sunny
Bermuda	22	18	cloudy
Bogota	19	9	rain
Bridgetown	29	25	windy
Brisbane	29	22	p/cldy
Buenos Aires	26	21	p/cldy
Cairo	18	10	haze
Canberra	27	12	cloudy
Cape Town	22	13	p/cldy
Casablanca	18	10	p/cldy
Chicago	8	0	flurry
Christchurch	19	7	sunny
Colombo	31	25	haze
Damascus	13	-4	sunny
Dar es Salaam	32	23	storms
Dhaka	33	18	sunny
Dubai	28	18	haze
Falkland Is.	15	11	cloudy
Harare	29	15	cloudy
Havana	28	18	p/cldy
Hong Kong	23	20	rain
Honolulu	21	19	p/cldy
Jakarta	32	25	storms
Jeddah	28	19	haze
Jerusalem	11	1	p/cldy
Johannesburg	24	13	storms
Kabul	16	4	sunny
Karachi	31	21	haze
Kolkata	32	17	sunny
Kuala Lumpur	33	26	storms
La Paz	13	4	showers
Lahore	30	15	haze
Lima	25	21	cloudy
Los Angeles	20	17	sunny
Maldives	32	27	sunny
Manila	32	25	sunny
Marrakesh	18	10	cloudy
Melbourne	31	18	cloudy
Miami	27	22	storms
Montego Bay	29	24	showers
Mumbai	30	21	sunny
Nairobi	24	16	p/cldy
New Orleans	17	13	showers
New Delhi	32	17	haze
New York	8	1	p/cldy
Ottawa	6	-2	windy
Perth	28	17	windy
Port-of-Spain	29	22	p/cldy
Rio de Janeiro	27	23	showers
Riyadh	28	15	sunny
San Francisco	19	15	p/cldy
Santiago	28	12	sunny
Seattle	7	4	p/cldy
Seoul	16	-1	sunny
Seychelles	30	26	showers
Singapore	31	26	cloudy
Sydney	26	19	showers
Taipei City	21	17	showers
Tangier	18	10	p/cldy
Tel Aviv	17	7	sunny
Tokyo	21	11	windy
Toronto	7	1	cloudy
Tunis	23	9	p/cldy
Vancouver	7	3	p/cldy
Washington	11	2	sunny
Wellington	18	11	sunny
Winnipeg	-23	-29	p/cldy

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather.com** ©2026

Prize Crossword 3,358 telegraph.co.uk/puzzles



Across

1 Notice argument lost (6)
5 Month before series seen on English writer (8)
9 Leading man, say, arresting female felon (10)
10 Number after six, red or white? (4)
11 Italian food in a can, or I'm fresh (8)
12 Road he designed that's a disappointment! (2,4)
13 Practice won't start for an hour or so? (1,3)
15 Thai meal ruined, something poisonous delivered? (4,4)
18 Miss during fight when the lights are off (8)
19 Thug, I'm encouraging you! (4)
21 Worse than hazardous, all the liquid (6)
23 Observe example in wallet (8)
25 European pub on Friday's opening (4)
26 Rip off pop star, diva (5,5)
27 Fail – as might turkey? (3,2,3)
28 Sun worshipper in sun, tide endlessly turning (6)

Down

2 Short, a theatrical work (5)
3 Popular castle I rebuilt, changing very little (9)
4 Drink container that's half open tipped up into baby feeder (6)
5 Less prestige, all the same (15)
6 Leader in Victoria, queen opening alcoholic drink (8)
7 Upset fiend settled (5)
8 Country where a Norman is lost (3,6)
14 Talented player batting, a graceful performer (9)
16 Alakazam, please? (5,4)
17 Cave in woodland area entered by everyone from below (8)
20 Mark secures lead on rare breed (6)
22 Reddish-brown liquid then naturally bottled (5)
24 Failing American in hole (5)

A fine Telegraph fountain pen and notebook will be awarded to the sender of the first correct solution opened from all those received.

To enter by email: Scan or photograph your filled-in solution and coupon and send to: **prize.puzzles@telegraph.co.uk** with **Sunday Cryptic 3,358** in the subject field. **To enter by post:** Send to **Sunday Cryptic 3,358**, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT.

Closing date: 9am Wednesday, March 11, Solution and winner in two weeks. See telegraph.co.uk/prize-terms for terms and conditions.

Solution No 3,356

■	■	S	T	A	G	E	W	H	I	S	P	E	R	■
S	■	T	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	O	■	M	■	U
M	E	A	N	D	E	R	■	L	I	N	C	O	L	N
E	■	P	■	E	■	N	■	I	■	G	■	T	■	D
A	X	L	E	■	T	E	M	P	O	■	V	I	C	E
R	■	E	■	U	■	S	■	A	■	W	■	V	■	R
C	O	R	O	N	E	T	■	D	E	E	P	E	S	T
A	■	■	■	T	■	■	■	■	■	A	■	■	■	H
M	A	S	T	I	F	F	■	F	O	R	E	S	E	E
P	■	A	■	E	■	O	■	A	■	Y	■	O	■	T
A	R	M	Y	■	B	R	A	I	N	■	A	R	I	A
I	■	U	■	F	■	W	■	N	■	B	■	T	■	B
G	O	R	I	L	L	A	■	T	R	E	F	O	I	L
N	■	A	■	A	■	R	■	L	■	A	■	U	■	E
■	B	I	R	T	H	D	A	Y	S	U	I	T	■	■

Name.....

Address.....

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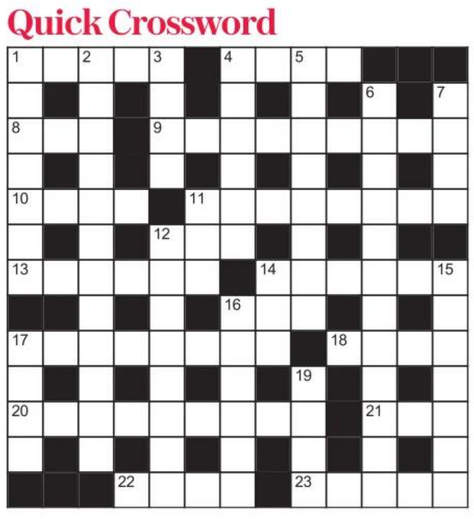
Last Week's Quick Solution

Across: 1 York, 3 Sherman, *(Yorkshireman)* 8 Acacia, 9 Lizard, 10 Attorney, 11 Rink, 12 Slayer, 15 Nozzle, 17 Stag, 19 Lacrosse, 22 Sonata, 23 Floral, 24 Integer, 25 Myth.

Down: 1 Yacht, 2 Rectory, 4 Halcyon, 5 Razor, 6 Adrenal, 7 Yawn, 13 Let-down, 14 Release, 16 Zoology, 18 Grape, 20 Cuff, 21 Slash.

Winner of Cryptic 3,356: John Ford, Chesterfield, Derbyshire

Quick Crossword



Across

1 *Deck's door* (5)
4 *Eat (toffee?)* (4)
8 *Meadow* (3)
9 (The) very outside (9)
10 Fairy godmother's gift? (4)
11 Snow slider (8)
12 Wager (3)
13 High-pitched voice (6)
14 Fool (6)
16 Date (3)
17 Game (8)
18 Vitality (4)
20 Travel bug (5,4)
21 Cask (3)
22 Spring/summer month (4)
23 Strapping (5)

Down

1 Fool (7)
2 Movement from one place to another (12)
3 Promote (4)
4 Incentive; root (6)
5 Worker (8)
6 Clean and jerk athlete? (12)
7 Blue ink (4)
11 Peg (3)
12 Gesundheit! (5,3)
14 Stream (3)
15 1811-1820 in Britain (7)
16 Sternutate (6)
17 Jack and Jill's container? (4)
19 Bash (one's toe) (4)

Help with today's Quick Crossword clues To hear individual answers or the whole solution, call **0905 757 0124**. Calls cost £1/min, plus network access charge. You must be 18 or over and have the bill payer's permission. SP: Spoke – Helpline 0333 202 3390.

The Telegraph

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The Sunday Telegraph

Sunday

Sport
Your 16-page section inside

Remembering wildlife pioneer Molly Burkett
p.4

Is Royal Mail deliberately delaying our second-class post?

‘It appears we can no longer trust Royal Mail’

A focus on parcels and an overtime crackdown is damaging our second-class letter post, says *Emily Smith*

When Jason Bevan’s wife of 58 years died in January, sympathy cards initially poured through his letterbox, providing a great source of comfort to the 80-year-old widower. Then, rather abruptly, they stopped.

A death notice had appeared in the local newspaper, which logically would have led to more messages of condolence. Instead, from Monday to Friday, Bevan received almost nothing. Distressed, he asked his postman what had happened. After checking the depot, the postman returned with “a great sheaf” of 13 letters that had been waiting to be delivered for days.

The reason for this build-up, postal workers say, is increasingly common: second-class mail is being held back until there is also a sufficient amount of first-class post to justify a delivery.

“I was very upset because it shouldn’t happen,” Bevan says. “When I was a young person, it was a wonderful service. But now it appears that we can no longer trust Royal Mail to perform the task we expect from it.”

His voice falters: “I have never known grief like this. I was married to my wife for 58 years and there’s so much to do when someone dies – it’s a very busy period. You don’t want added complications like somebody not delivering post for you.”

Behind Bevan’s experience lies a practice that postal workers say has become routine. Second-class mail is often not dispatched from centres to local depots until there is first-class mail to accompany it. It means customers are failing to receive important documents, such as medical appointments, mortgage documents and even speeding fines on time.

One postman, with 21 years’ service, would only speak on the condition of anonymity, but shared: “We don’t actually receive a lot of second-class post from the mail centres until there’s enough first-class [post] with it. So, on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, if you’ve got nine bits of junk mail and a couple of second-class letters, that will stay in the mail centre. We don’t get it in the depot until someone sends you [something] first class.

“That’s why sometimes you might not have any [mail] for a few days and suddenly get eight lumps of post at once,” he says. There has been formal instruction from managers on this policy, but it is now delivered verbally to avoid a paper trail, he adds.

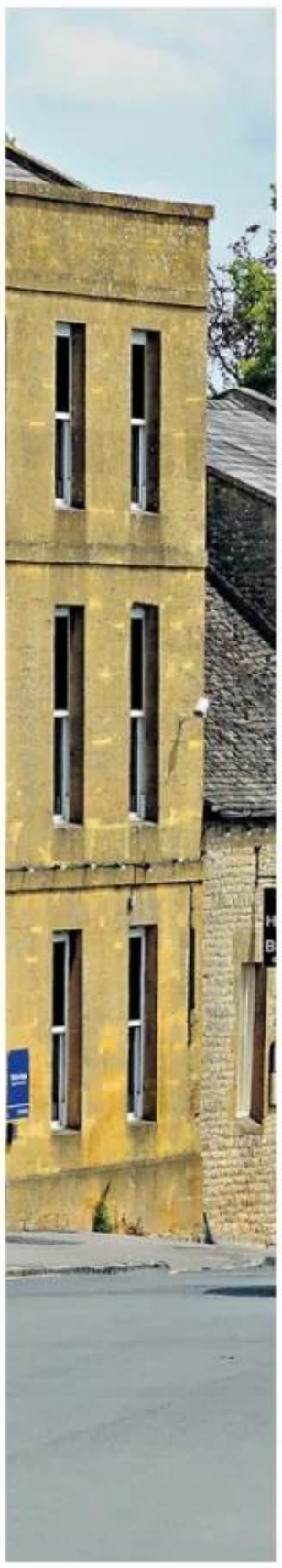
Even once second-class post does reach a depot, the prioritisation of parcels and first-class mail can mean it is delayed further. Another serving postwoman, who also wishes to remain anonymous, says: “Parcels definitely take priority. We are told to take first-class out with us but you are just driving it around. Second-class [post] is just sitting in the frame [where postal workers retrieve letters to be posted] and isn’t even looked at. Sometimes the frames are so full they are overflowing. On some duties, mail hasn’t gone out for eight or nine days.

“Even first-class – it says it’s prioritised, but it isn’t because we can’t manage that on top of all of the parcels and all the specials and all of the collections that we have to do when they restrict our hours,” she says.

David Pearson, 70, from Haworth in west Yorkshire, has also been affected by this neglect of second-class post. The retired businessman said deliveries to his home have become sporadic, with days of silence followed by sudden deluges of post. On one occasion, he failed to receive his weekly magazine subscriptions, then three weeks’ worth turned up at once. “It was an enormous pile of post,” he says. “It made a hell of a bang when it all landed through the letterbox.”

One important document he missed because of the problem was a speeding ticket. Having never received the initial letter, Pearson was only alerted to the fine when another notification arrived months later – this time threatening court action.

When he rang to apologise, he was told it was commonplace. “She



GETTY IMAGES/JAY WILLIAMS/ROGER MOODY/GUZELIAN

Doing the rounds: traditional postal services are under threat

'I have never known grief like this... you don't want added complications'

Jason Bevan

said it happens all the time – they send them out second-class, [so] loads of people say they've not had them." The same pattern has affected his medical care, too, with hospital appointment letters often failing to arrive.

A visit to his local sorting office provided little assurance. Unable to see a manager, Pearson was told by a member of staff that severe staff shortages meant second-class post was being held back.

His faith in the service has dissipated. "No, I definitely would not trust [second-class post]. I would always hesitate now if I was sending letters," he says. Last year he even abandoned plans to post invitations out for his 70th birthday. "I had my party last year in the village and I wanted to send out nice cards to make it a bit special, but I didn't – it all went by email. I just don't think you can trust the post."

The backdrop is a company under mounting regulatory and financial strain. In Oct 2025, Ofcom fined Royal Mail £21m for missing its 2024-25 delivery targets, with just 77 per cent of first-class mail arriving on time against a 93 per cent target. For second-class, 92.5 per cent met the deadline, against a 98.5 per cent target. It is the third consecutive year that Royal Mail has received multimillion-pound fines for poor performance.

At Christmas this disruption was laid bare, with approximately 16 million people receiving their letters and cards late, according to Citizens Advice. The disruption also comes despite soaring stamp prices, with the cost of a first-class stamp more than doubling to £1.70 since 2020, with second-class stamps at 87p.

Earlier this month, Alistair Cochrane, Royal Mail's chief executive, said performance was "still not good enough" and called for reform of the universal service, including plans to scrap Saturday deliveries for second-class letters – a proposal that has triggered a backlash from customers and workers alike, with strike threats from the Communications Workers Union. Although privatised, Royal Mail is bound by statutory obligations set out in the Postal Services Act, which requires it to provide a six-day-a-week universal service in the UK. Any large change to letter delivery (including reducing second-class services) requires regulatory approval, creating an ongoing tussle between the company and Government over the future of services.

Liam Byrne, chairman of the business and trade committee, which last week gave Royal Mail two weeks to respond to allegations about its prioritisation of parcels, described the company's letter-delivery service as "way off track".

He said: "The Royal Mail service is now so poor that the committee has resolved to call executives into account for these issues in Parliament, along with Ofcom. The committee is very concerned by consistent and growing reports – and now many direct representations – about significant failures in Royal Mail's letter-delivery service.

"EP Group's takeover was approved on a legal undertaking that it would maintain the Universal Service Obligation that is the bedrock of the UK's postal service. But one year in, even first-class deliveries are way off track."

'It was an enormous pile of post – it made a hell of a bang when it all landed through the letterbox'

David Pearson

Postal workers say this shift away from reliable letter delivery has accelerated in recent years. "It's been getting worse since Covid," one says. "Before then, if you went out and left a single letter in your frame you'd get a phone call to say you can come back and pick this up."

The explosion in parcel volumes has transformed the job, with delivery routes originally created for far lower volumes. "The routes were designed by a computer 10 years ago. It calculated your duty at four-and-a-half hours. With 30 parcels you could do 800 houses. But what's happened since then is you've got those 800 houses and instead of 30 parcels you've now got 120 and the same amount of time," one worker explains.

Overtime, meanwhile, has also been restricted for staff, with the company enforcing strict rules prohibiting postal workers from clocking up longer hours to fulfil their delivery quotas.

The result is that something has to give – and, increasingly, that something is letter delivery. One postman describes the human cost, too: "All of my customers know exactly why they are still waiting on mortgage documents that need to be signed. I've had mortgage documents; hospital appointments; I had a lady that missed her cancer screening appointment because she didn't have the letter until after the appointment; people who are waiting for decree nisi with divorce – all sorts of stuff.

"We've gone from the stereotypical whistling postie with a bag to a guy who is running around like Amazon [drivers]," he adds.

Some staff argue this transformation is no accident. They believe it is a conscious strategy to hollow out Britain's letter-delivery service altogether. "I believe that the managers at the top end of Royal Mail are wanting to make the service so dreadful that the Government has to take on letters," one postwoman said.

"They don't want to deliver the letters – it doesn't make any money. All the money's in parcels, and that's all they're worried about."

A Royal Mail spokesman said: "We always aim to deliver letters within the target time frames for each service, and for second-class mail this is within three days. We would like to reassure customers 91.6 per cent of second-class mail is delivered on time.

"Large customers, such as the NHS and banks, are increasingly choosing to send letters on slower services – currently 48 per cent of letters are due for delivery within five days, 44 per cent within three days and only 8 per cent of letters are due the next day. To deliver an efficient service, our letter-sorting technology is designed to group letters together due for delivery on a specified day.

"This can mean several items arrive together; but we would not hold back mail if that meant it would miss its target delivery date."

Little auks on the stairs, guillemots

After her death at 93, wildlife pioneer Molly Burkett's children recall a life of badgers, barn owls – and selfless love. By *Guy Kelly*

"I do like the story about mum bringing a friend home and being met at the door by a badger with red lips," Sophie Burkett says.

"Mum kept a badger at home, *obviously*, and her very posh aunt had come to visit. This aunt always had the newest clothes, the best handbag, all of that. And one day, this badger appeared from nowhere, shook the bag until everything fell out, and ate her lipstick … then answered the door."

She laughs. Seated beside her in the living room at her home in rural Lincolnshire is her older brother St John. He shakes his head. "There are so many stories like that…"

Since the siblings announced the death in January of their extraordinary mother, Molly Burkett, at the age of 93, the dust is being blown off more and more by the day.

A beloved eccentric, she was a lifelong animal rescuer, a self-taught behaviouralist, a pioneering wildlife sanctuary owner, a sometime breeder, an expert falconer, a teacher, a museum founder, an educational psychologist, a prolific writer of books, a reluctant TV star, and an indefatigable environmental campaigner.

"We've had to do a lot of fact-checking, because she would tell us all these tales, and a lot of them were unbelievable. But amazing things turned out to be absolutely true," St John, 65, a retired headteacher, says.

Molly was born in 1932 in Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, where her parents ran a grocers and tea blenders. As a girl, she would hand sandwiches out to First World War veterans sleeping rough on the seafront, "appalled that people who had served their country would be left helpless," St John says. When the Second World War came, she was evacuated several times, including to Netherseal, Derbyshire, where she stayed with the village herbalist.

"She would be given a list of herbs to collect, and would come across blackbirds that had fallen out of the nest, or thrushes with broken wings," Sophie says. "Local people would just kill them, but she said 'No, I'm going to try and do something about it.'"

She met her husband John Burkett, an engineer, while studying teaching and educational psychology at Goldsmiths, London. United by a love of wildlife, particularly birds, they married in 1954 and were soon caring for an injured kestrel. Not long after, the caravan they shared on Lasham airfield, near Alton in Hampshire, where John was working on the Blue Streak missile for de Havilland, became the first site of their animal welfare sanctuary.

They moved to a more sprawling site at Hough-on-the Hill in Lincolnshire a few years later and set up what would become one of Britain's longest-running private wildlife rehabilitation centres.

St John and Sophie, a yoga teacher, grew up thinking a "normal" childhood involved driving halfway across the country to retrieve an injured swallow, sharing laundry baskets with badger cubs, having grass snakes loose in the attic, or requiring first aid because a "mentally damaged" buzzard pierced their hand with its talons. "Mum went running out to check the buzzard was OK," Sophie says.

My family and other animals: Molly Burkett with children St John and Sophie, and several other members of the household

At one point there were more than 400 animals being cared for by Molly and John at home. It meant family holidays rarely happened – "good luck finding somebody who'll feed hundreds of animals for a week," St John says.

None of the animals were given names, as that forged an unhelpful emotional bond. For years, Sophie says, an auk lived on the stairs of the family home. "They normally live on clifftops, so that was the best place. It used to play with a ping-pong ball, and when *Match of the Day* came on he would zoom around the room while the theme tune played."

St John laughs. "We'd have guillemots in the bath, too. They'd be fed with fish scraps, so we had to clean out the bath before we could get in. The smell of fish and guillemots … you can imagine."

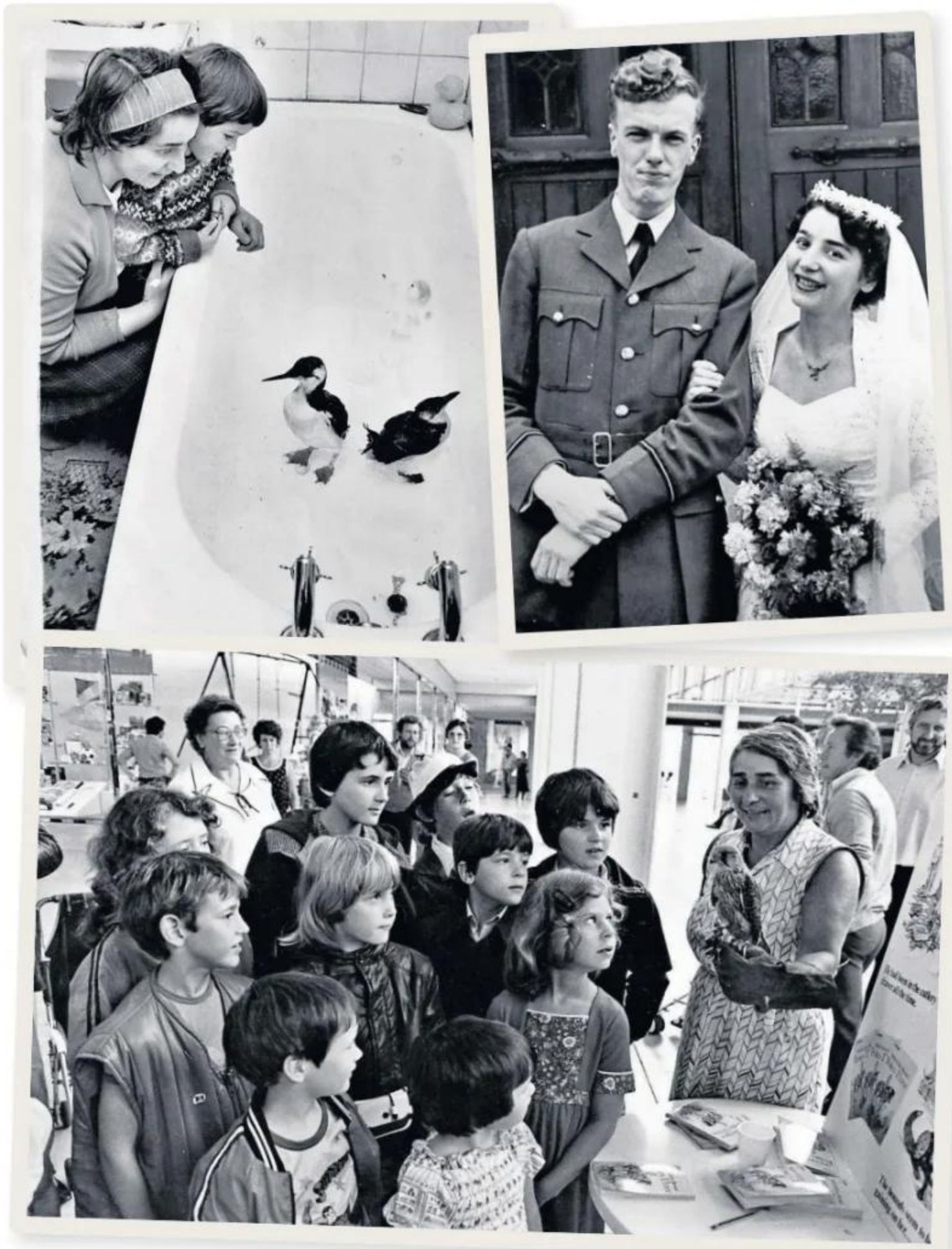
> 'Family holidays rarely happened – good luck finding someone who'll feed hundreds of animals for a week'

Then there was the airing cupboard full of gravely unwell owls, and the African grey parrot who forced their father to quit smoking. "Dad was a 40-a-day man, and gave up as soon as he realised that every time he'd come into the lounge, the parrot would cough," St John says.

Every day, sometimes several times a day, a new animal would arrive, or a call would come from somewhere in the country asking if they could help. "They'd sometimes just turn up. One morning mum and dad woke up to find piles and piles of boxes on the doorstep with a note saying, 'We've stopped our breeding project'. When she opened the boxes, there must have been more than 20 barn

LORNE CAMPBELL/GUZELIAN

in the bath and a parrot with a cough



owls in there," Sophie says.

This was all in a different era, before the red tape that's so prevalent now could scupper the Burketts' charitable venture. They were seen to be doing a good deed for the community (and helping the then much smaller RSPCA), rather than anything deemed dangerous or untrustworthy.

The family would be given bread and pastries by local bakers – "that's how we discovered that badgers absolutely love cream cakes," Sophie says – and cadets from RAF Cranwell would help build aviaries. Bird seed, bedding, chicks for the raptors and all manner of other donations came from the community, too.

"I mean, it's just a very, very different world," St John says. "But they were the first to do it, really, so there wasn't a precedent."

Molly at work and (top right) with husband John; inset, right, Sophie and St John today with one of the last animals in the family's care

Despite having a house full of creatures, Molly was resolutely opposed to domestication. "When we were out and she found wild birds of prey performing in displays, she'd often confront people," Sophie admits.

The Burketts did all this despite working full-time. Molly taught PE, maths, English and "life skills" to teenagers, as well as all subjects at primary level.

She also worked as an educational psychologist. John, meanwhile, was an engineer, often taking RAF commissions before specialising in agriculture.

Some events tested the couple. The cost of dealing with thousands of seabirds after the Torrey Canyon spill hit them hard, for instance, forcing them to sell their home in Hampshire and move to Lincolnshire in 1969. Yet they never let anybody down.

"I don't know how they did it. She'd always be there to meet us at school. I don't think we ever felt like we were missing out."

Throughout her life, Molly would help support her work with animals by writing. At the age of eight she contributed to Enid Blyton's *Sunny Stories* magazine. Later, at Goldsmiths, she met CS Lewis and Edith Sitwell, who encouraged her to keep writing. Many of her books were inspired by the animals she had at home.

> She is said to have been the first person in Britain to be declared a Nimby

The Year of the Badger told the story of Nikki, who spent a year with the family; *Foxes, Owls and All: Lively, Humorous Tales of an Animal-Crazy Household* revelled in the chaos at home.

Occasional TV work contributed, too. In an age when women were rarely on television, let alone as expert voices, Molly appeared alongside David Attenborough on the BBC's *Zoo Quest* in the late 1950s. Decades later she appeared on an episode of *That's Life* with a crow that had a taste for beer. Ultimately, she preferred to write and work at home.

In wildlife circles, at least, her skills became known. One day she flew to Amsterdam to help a zoo vet with a baby giant panda who wouldn't feed. "She said it was ever so easy. She just dipped her finger in honey, offered it to the panda, and as soon as the panda suckled on that, she swapped it to the mother's teat," Sophie says.

Before the Tower of London established its raven-breeding programme, Molly supplied them to the Beefeaters.

"Mum loved watching animals, learning from them and working out what they needed. She did the same with people," Sophie says.

"She had this real compassion for everything and everyone," St John says. "She was a fighter for social justice and treated everybody the same." Her long-time local MP, Douglas Hogg (now Viscount Hailsham), had a soft spot for her, so frequent were her letters to harangue him in the name of one social or environmental cause or another.

After protesting against nuclear waste being buried under a Lincolnshire airfield, she is said to have been the first person in Britain to be declared a "nimby" in an article in *The Times*. In 1974, she was shortlisted to stand in the general election for the Liberals in Grantham. She's said to have been relieved she wasn't chosen.

"Actually, another thing about mum and dad is that we had a foster sister, Pauline," Sophie says, at one point in our conversation. John and Molly had fostered Pauline, a six year-old Black girl in the mid 1960s. She was two years older than St John, and stayed with the family for "a couple of years, mostly at weekends and on holidays" as very much part of the family.

"They tried to adopt her, but weren't allowed. The rules were very strict in those days, that families couldn't adopt children of a different colour or religion. It was the most upset I ever saw them, when they were told they couldn't," Sophie says.

When the family moved from Hampshire to Lincolnshire, Pauline stayed in the South. They later lost touch entirely. "We have no idea where she is, or if she knows mum has died," St John says.

When John died of infarction, aged 83, in 2012, the day-to-day operation at Hough-on-the Hill became too much for Molly alone, who was already suffering from arthritis and dementia. The 57 remaining birds and animals were either rehomed or released.

A handful of animals moved with Molly to a smaller home nearby, and remained even as her condition worsened in later years. She moved into a care home, from which she would attempt to break out almost daily, but found joy thanks to Our Dementia Choir, the Nottinghamshire-based charity originally set up by Vicky McClure, the *Line of Duty* actress.

The final animals remain at home with Sophie: five in total, including an obtuse parrot and a crow with deformed hips. And here in the living room, all around, are reminders of their one-of-a-kind mother.

Molly once held a faint hope that one of her children might carry on her work. "But it was such a commitment, and it was a changing world. By the end of her life, the world mum knew didn't really exist anymore," Sophie says.

She and St John agree that their mother represented a Britain now long gone, when a life like hers was implausible, but not yet quite impossible. In fact, one of the most common reactions to the obituaries has been to ask why on earth hasn't there been a biopic made about Molly Burkett?

At this, St John and Sophie both smile. "I know," St John says, looking at his sister. "That would be great, wouldn't it?"

‘It’s idyllic’ – the jobs that come with their own home

With aspiring homeowners increasingly priced out of the market, ‘tied accommodation’ roles have never looked so good. *Annie Hayes* reports

With housing costs now the single biggest strain on finances, workers are hunting for a radical solution. And some are finding it through a hidden gem in the employment market: “tied accommodation” roles.

From chefs and gardeners to teachers and animal carers, workers are increasingly seeking positions that offer refuge from the relentless climb of housing costs.

The figures are stark. The average weekly mortgage payment has soared to £242, according to the Government’s latest English Housing Survey, up from £182 just five years ago. For renters, the outlook is even more grim, with Zoopla reporting average monthly rents of £1,320, outstripping typical mortgage payments.

In this landscape, a job that includes a home is not a mere perk; it’s a life-changing financial reprieve.

Vicki Alford

Vicki Alford, 47, horse unit manager at Blue Cross rehoming centre in Burford, agrees. For two decades, her role caring for over 60 rescued horses on-site – and overseeing nearly 500 more at properties nationwide – has come with a home.

She started in a flat and later moved to a three-bedroom bungalow with a large garden to accommodate her growing family. Managing a 120-acre site where horses often arrive in desperate need of veterinary and behavioural care is a round-the-clock labour of love. “Every month, around 20 to 30 need retraining,” she explains.

Alford’s need for an on-site house was proven one memorable night when 15 mares foaled simultaneously. “I was the only one on duty, so I helped with the births until the vet arrived,” she says.

Her family has also benefited from the lifestyle that comes with the job. Alford’s two children grew up surrounded by horses, and freedom from a mortgage or rent has allowed her to save substantially.

While her part-time salary might be modest – the full-time equivalent is paid up to £35,436 – having a cost-free home has paid off. The arrangement has enabled her to save for a house, which she now rents out, securing her financial future.

Louise Ellis

It’s a similar story for Louise Ellis, head gardener at English Heritage’s Audley End House and Gardens in Saffron Walden.

“I’ve lived and worked here for 17 years. I started out as a trainee gardener on the minimum wage after a career change from social care and gained my horticultural qualification,” she explains.

Now in charge of 13 paid staff and around 65 volunteers, Ellis oversees the landscaped parkland and the Victorian kitchen garden, which includes a vinery dating back to the 1820s. What she particularly loves about her role is that, while she has climbed to a managerial position, she still does much of the hands-on gardening.

She lives in Orchard Cottage, which is one of the original Victorian staff houses. The one-storey, two-bedroom home has character features including a vaulted ceiling, along with a modern extension containing the bedrooms and a bathroom. Ellis lives alone as her partner is based in Norfolk.

“It’s very well-maintained and sits within the unrestored parts of the walled garden. I also have my own private garden with fruit trees,” she says. Ironically, there is a large, detached red-brick home called the Head Gardener’s House, but that is now let out to paying holiday guests.

‘I helped 15 mares give birth in one night’

Vicki Alford (with Ginge)

‘Our children play in the hills or on the beach, visit castles and play golf’

Billy McKechnie

‘I have my own private garden with fruit trees’

Louise Ellis

There are four staff members who live on site, including the stable manager and other gardeners. “The provision of housing is an allowance for our out-of-hours responsibilities. We must respond quickly if there is an emergency, which requires us to live on site,” she says.

“I do pay rent, but it’s subsidised. It has enabled me to save a quarter of my salary every month, something I’ve been very focused on now that I am 55 and retirement is on the horizon. I’ll need to work until I reach the state pension age, but my job keeps me physically fit, so that’s a benefit,” she says.

She is aware that she lives in an expensive market town, where a two-bedroom home costs on average £1,359 per month. “I wouldn’t be able to live here on my salary if I had to rent privately. I’d probably need to move further out towards Suffolk to afford a similar home,” she says.

“English Heritage is a great landlord. It deals with repairs promptly and is progressive – we have oil central heating, but it is looking at air-source heat pumps and alternative fuel sources,” she says.

Ellis doesn’t own a property elsewhere and knows that when she retires from Audley End, she will be back to paying for a home in the private rental sector.

Billy McKechnie

Hospitality, with its long and sometimes anti-social hours, is another industry that frequently offers staff accommodation – particularly in remotely located hotels.

Billy McKechnie, 45, is general manager of the Royal Marine Hotel in Brora, located an hour’s drive from Inverness along the North Coast 500.

He has been in the role for three and a half years. Part of his daily duties include playing the bagpipes to welcome guests to breakfast. Along with his wife, Minette, and their three children, he is provided with accommodation.

“Our children play in the hills or at the beach, visit neighbouring castles and play golf in their free time – it’s idyllic,” says McKechnie.

Lifestyle aside, the perk of staff accommodation is a definite help for the family’s purse strings. “The hotel contributes towards the rent on our house, which is £1,200 per month. We chose the house ourselves. It’s five minutes by car from the hotel.”

In an area that is losing residents to nearby cities, providing hotel staff with subsidised housing is a key incentive for securing their commitment.

“We have a house in Inverness that we rent out. We wouldn’t have moved from there if the hotel didn’t provide us with a home,” he says.

Plus, if the family had sold their main home to buy closer to McKechnie’s workplace, they would have faced both seller’s fees and stamp duty costs.

R.FRESSON/A HUMAN AGENCY

The Midults Annabel Rivkin & Emilie McMeekan

My friend’s denial about weight-loss jabs feels dishonest. Should I confront her?

Dear A&E

Q A really good friend of mine has lost a huge amount of weight – probably five stone – over the last two years. She flatly denies it’s because of weight-loss jabs, which none of us believe.

It’s so annoying that she can’t be honest when plenty of us are struggling to lose those last few pounds. I’ve been trying to get and stay thin since I was a teenager.

Why is she being so weird about this? Should we confront her?

—Annoyed

Dear Annoyed

A Where to begin? How about here: What has it got to do with you, and why does it matter? Yes, that seems like a reasonable place to start because this attitude is all about shame, privilege and humiliation.

Perhaps your struggle to lose those last few pounds qualifies you to make certain that people own up to their shortcomings and their cheating? Perhaps thinness – that attribute you have always prized so highly – loses its lustre for you when it doesn’t involve genetic pre-programming or self-deprivation? Clearly your friend’s unexpected (and, it seems, unwelcome) weight loss has thrown up all sorts of feelings in you and has made you feel somehow wronged because of your struggle.

Apart from the fact that it is none of your business and that everyone is entitled to a private life, have you wondered why your friend might want to exercise discretion? Consider this: maybe she has felt ashamed all her life because of the narrative that has confronted her everywhere she turned, telling her that thin is good and fat is ugly, lazy and morally reprehensible? Maybe she felt helpless because no matter how much she exercised, how rigorously she added up the calories at the end of the day, she somehow couldn’t move the blasted dial. Maybe she was despairing – trying not to be in photographs, trying not to be seen in swimwear and being scared of summer. Maybe she doesn’t want to revisit that shame. Maybe she feels free for the first time. Maybe she would not welcome your forensic lens casting its triggered eyes over her weight loss, GLP-1-assisted or otherwise.

Less of the “none of us believe” please. It’s time for you to listen to yourself, Annoyed, because you sound as though you’re ganging up on her in the playground. So, she was othered when she was fat and now the mission is to other her again because she’s not? And not only has she lost weight (how *dare* she when we were all happy with her as the fat one?) but she has done it with … ease? How *dare* she?

We really shouldn’t be commenting on other people’s bodies. Yes, we know that sounds worthy, but no good will come of it. What if one of your group looked really, really radiant? Has she had a facelift? How can she afford it? Why won’t she admit it? How dare she look wonderful without letting us analyse her shortcuts. Isn’t this all just envy and threat?

We all know that we compare and despair, but this variety of comparing is particularly insidious because you are pretending to despair of her: Why can’t she just be honest? Why can’t she admit that she’s not really thin, she’s fake thin? She hasn’t earned it, so let’s shine a light on that, right?

Is it that you feel the societally triggered need to reignite shame in her because you have shame about your last few pounds? Or huge pride in the fact that slimness has always been crucial to your identity?

Our narratives around thinness have become even weirder and more extreme since GLP-1s landed, and we need to stop and remind ourselves that what your friend is experiencing is her business, and what you are experiencing is yours. Blame the patriarchy. Blame the outdated idea of BMI. But don’t blame her. If you are so cross about her “success”, try the jabs yourself.

Just as someone being pregnant doesn’t make anyone else more or less pregnant, and someone else having lots of money doesn’t make us richer or poorer, this woman’s body shape is irrelevant to yours. It does not make you any fatter or thinner.

We know we sound strict. But this is not your fault. You are operating under the same forces as she is – as we all are. However, we can, if we choose, begin to think for ourselves.

While you are working out how you really feel about this and why you are driven to force some kind of confession out of this woman, you could try a new approach. Tell your friends that you have had a think about this woman: that she is clearly very happy, and you are very happy for her.

And then you could just leave it at that, Annoyed. There are lessons to be learnt here, lessons that could make you a happier person. And a better friend.

Write to us

Do you have a dilemma that you’re grappling with? Email Annabel and Emilie on ***themidults@telegraph.co.uk***. All questions are kept anonymous. They are unable to reply personally

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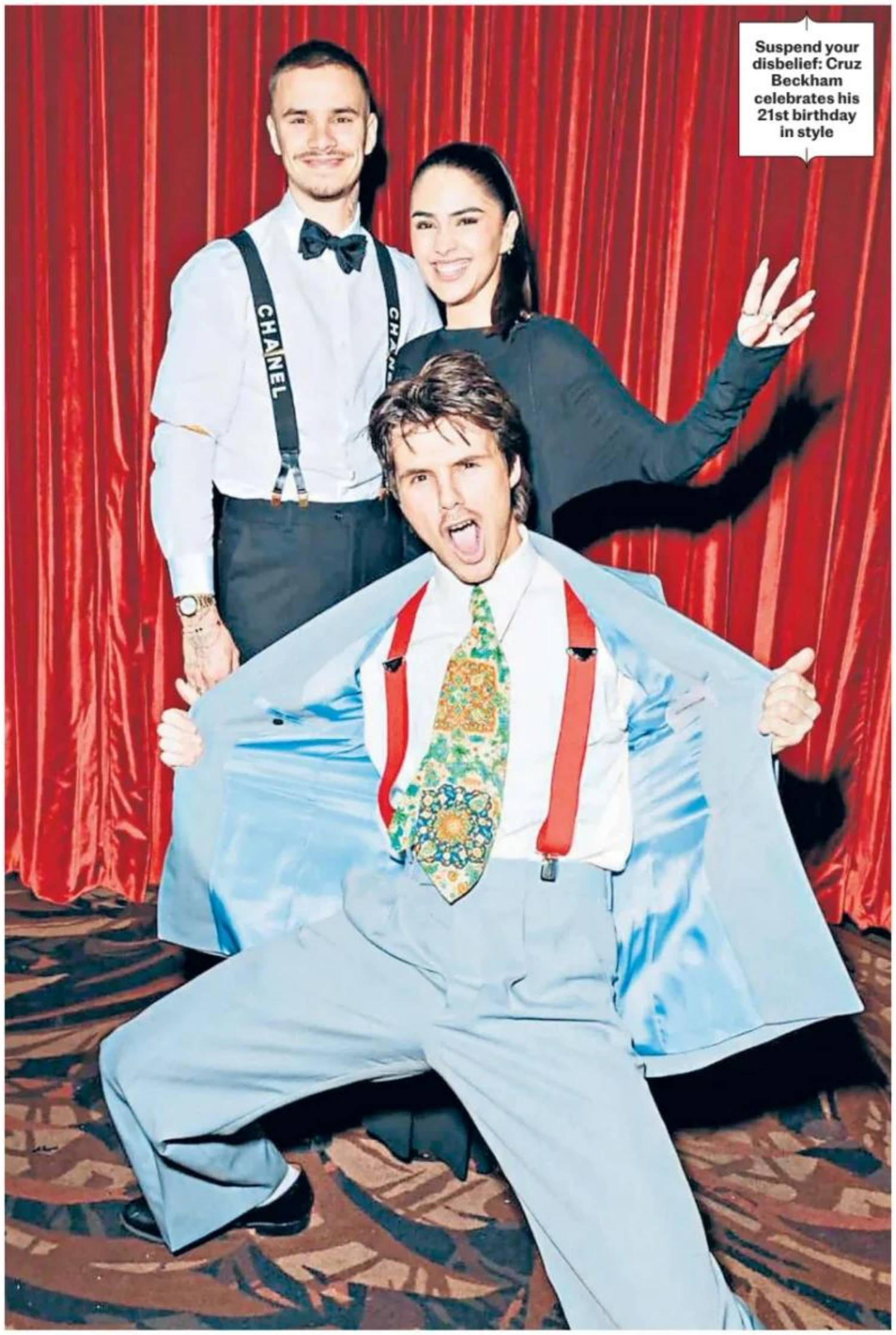
Strap in: braces are back in style

The fashion cognoscenti are turning to a classic formalwear accessory, says *Stephen Doig*



Suspend your disbelief: Cruz Beckham celebrates his 21st birthday in style

Braces, those relics of the golden era of MGM matinee idol style and stately dress of the early 20th century, have clipped themselves back into the sartorial consciousness once more.

Perhaps it's not so surprising – the greatest tenet of fashion being "what goes around comes around", and the winds of men's dress have shifted to a more tailored form in recent years – but what stands out is the fact that the younger generation are wearing them.

The Beckham boys, posting from Cruz Beckham's 21st party, were sporting them. Both the birthday boy and his brother, Romeo, 23, were wearing suits with braces – the latter's were emblazoned with the Chanel logo. A roster of men at Florentine fashion fair Pitti Uomo also featured the latest in tailoring trends.

My own relationship with braces is a chequered one, running the gamut from my role as a rootin', tootin' hillbilly in a (highly lauded, I'll have you know) Nineties am-dram production of *Annie Get Your Gun* to my vintage American stars and stripes pair in the early Noughties. (Fuelled by designer Hedi Slimane at Dior Homme, this was the indie sleaze era of braces

> 'It's not because I harbour a desire to be Niles Crane – they're just much better'

on lean, slick silhouettes and cool London club nights; those braces, by the way, were hauled off me by the then fashion director of Vogue to borrow for a fashion shoot with Kate Moss, although they were later derided by a date as I'd made the faux pas of wearing them with a belt.)

To some, braces are a glorious throwback to a more considered and gentlemanly time, part of the proper and correct accessories of upright dress: Cary Grant and Gary Cooper, the mobsters of Chicago in the 1930s, David Bowie in the 1980s and, in that same era, the Gordon Gekko "greed is good" aesthetic. There's a wonderful black and white photo of my great-great-grandfather taken in the Twenties in his finery, braces ever present.

Tom Chamberlin, editor and host of the "Luxury Dispatch" podcast, has long been a fan. "I have been extolling the virtues of braces for a long time now," he says. "It's not because I harbour a deep desire to be Niles Crane (that's by the by), but because, practically, it's much better for you. Trousers hang better when they're held up by your shoulders rather than your stomach.

They also have the added bonus of ensuring that your shirt stays tucked in, as the shoulder straps prevent it from riding up,

Chamberlin adds: "Gary Cooper would never be seen without braces and as he's the best-dressed man of all time. He's worth emulating."

As for the finer points of the details to look out for: "The metal adjustment slides should be level with each other, and I would recommend silk or moire over wool. Braces should be fastened with leather ends over trouser brace buttons, not crocodile clips. It's the only thing that's sartorially more egregious than the pre-tied bow tie".

I'd err towards the more traditional end of the men's dress spectrum. Braces are ceremonial, so will look a tad jarring with a more "dress-down" suit. Similarly, it's worth adding extra elements of the full kit and caboodle; a pocket square and shirt with double cuffs, for example. Although, if you're keen to go full early Noughties indie, that's an option too – worn with jeans and a casual shirt – although it's a tricky style verve to pull off for most of us. My advice: if you're planning to revisit braces this season, stick with the classic look.

BRACE YOURSELF...

White braces with leather ends, £15, Anderson Kilts

Hand tooled leather braces, £200, Ralph Lauren

Burgundy leather end braces, £30, Darcy

Dove grey braces, £90, Benson & Clegg

Green braces with leather ends, £99, Cordings

Four amazing Sunday drives with a difference

Mark Gallivan introduces a quartet of cracking roadburners that will delight any thrill-seeking motorist – and draw admiring glances from fellow aficionados

Before Christmas we published a feature in *Telegraph.co.uk/cars* that suggested a few offbeat models to try if you were driving purely for enjoyment. It was, we shall modestly say, something of a hit. So we've come up with four more amazing, unusual motors.

Naturally, the imperative for involving dynamics and a vigorous engine have been retained, while ensuring that each offers something a little (or even a lot) different to the Porsche-badged default.

So here are four more that deliver maximum thrills – while staying under 2.0 litres in capacity. The road beckons...

BEST FOR RECAPTURING THE MAGIC OF ITALIAN SPORTS CARS

ALFA ROMEO 4C COUPÉ *(2013-2019)*

The 4C is the baby supercar dressed up as an Armani-clad glamour-puss. It's easily the best-looking sports car Alfa Romeo has made in more than a decade. A thrumming four-cylinder, 1.75-litre slingshot weighing 895kg, with no power steering and, someone's genius idea, a front bonnet that's welded firmly shut. Plus, the seats and radio aren't great either.

So, another glorious misfit Alfa Romeo, right? Not one bit of it. The 4C remains as pretty as a peach with supercar looks. The driving experience is highly immersive; so much so that you'll be concentrating 100 per cent every second you drive it.

The steering is so direct it's barely believable, at the cost of excessive tug on the front tyres from road imperfections (aka tram-lining). If you believe the magic of Alfa Romeo had dissipated over the decades, the 4C Coupé is an experience that harks back to the greatest Alfas of old.

The 1.75-litre in-line four is loud and the experience is best enjoyed away from motorways. Instead, head for minor roads and try to tame this Alfa Romeo that bucks like a bronco and sucks any driver into a state of full concentration. The 4C is so raw that it makes the sublime Alpine A110 feel like a highly tuned hatchback; it never permits you to sit back and relax. Every input needs commitment, like the steering that initially feels heavy for a car weighing under 900kg, or the brakes that demand a firm push when trying to scrub off speed as a corner approaches.

Unlike the current Alfa Giulia saloon that demands relatively little driver effort, the 4C feels uncompromising. Think of it as a budget Ferrari, delivering engagement like few sports cars today. Therein lies its appeal. It demands effort yet rewards with unforgettable drives that will be talked about weeks after experiencing them.

Like a thoroughbred stallion, it requires attention. Things to check are the straightness of the Formula 1-style carbon-fibre chassis "tub", while the bolts holding the subframes to the tub require tightening every two years because the chassis is so stiff. The gearbox and wishbone joints must also be checked thoroughly.

BEST FOR THE LAST GASP OF LIGHTWEIGHT SPORTS COUPÉS

ALPINE A110 *(2017-2026)*

This delectable beauty is a study in French finesse. It's small and light – 198mm shorter and a whopping 233kg lighter than a Porsche Cayman, considered by many aficionados as the optimum blend of usability and performance.

Renault-owned Alpine has fitted a turbocharged 1,798cc four-cylinder engine developing 249bhp, which drives the rear wheels via a Getrag seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, all mounted on an aluminium chassis. The engine may come from a Mégane RS but is responsive and performs well in this lightweight Alpine.

Alpine's engineers have cleverly set up the car to make the steering feel sufficiently light to drive in town but, allied to the gearbox's crisp paddle changes, it makes the car feel playful when tackling bends. The use of relatively narrow front tyres (205/45 R17 and wider 235/40 R17 items at the rear) is a trick borrowed from the mantra of the Lotus Elise and Mazda MX-5 – drivers reach the limits of adhesion faster at lower speeds, adding to driving safety.

This also makes the A110 dart from corner to corner without ever feeling intimidating. On a circuit, the agility to quickly adjust the car's position for braking and exit from the corner is sublime. It can achieve lap times surprisingly close to supercars overburdened with heavy drivetrains and larger bodyshells. The A110's incredible deftness is not hindered one bit by the 1.8-litre engine; a power to weight ratio of 1 horsepower per 3.7kg says it all.

There are few reports of major reliability concerns, but on used examples check whether the oil solenoid recall was completed. Ensure that an Alpine specialist checks the structural integrity of the chassis, along with the suspension and brakes. If you see a patchy service history, walk away.

JUSTIN LEIGHTON/MAL COM GRIFFITHS

BEST FOR UNCOMPROMISING DRIVING THRILLS (AND LOUD PRETEND RACING CAR NOISES)

CATERHAM SEVEN *(1973-PRESENT)*

Everyone has a version of what God did on the seventh day. I'm putting money into the notion he went for a spin in Caterham Seven. This car is, without any discussion please, one of the finest cars for back-to-basics Sunday driving; few other vehicles are as capable of drowning you in excitement.

Never been in a Caterham and curious? To get a feel for this minimalist marvel, sit on the floor with two firm cushions wedged into your back, legs and arms out straight, then start making the loudest pretend racing car noises you can. Uncomfortable, you might think, but the real thing's razor-sharp responses will beguile you.

The best part of any Caterham is how the tiniest input from the steering wheel immediately tugs the car left or right. Because you sit so low, with the front wheels and mudguards standing proud on each side of the long bonnet, you can place the front wheels exactly where you want.

The majority of Caterhams have Ford-derived engines that pull strongly and burble with an uneven bark from the side-mounted exhaust at full throttle. During fine weather you can remove the doors altogether. Sitting in the alloy tub with the engine roaring and the wind blasting by your ears, it's the nearest you will ever get to the experience of riding a motorbike while on four wheels.

Caterham folk are genuine enthusiasts and look after their cars, but buy new if you can. The starter Seven 170 with a Suzuki 650cc engine for under £30,000 provides more than enough grins per pound. Think 650cc is puny? Think again; 0-60mph in 6.9sec is a typical indication of how this car feels far faster than it might seem on paper. If you need the ultimate Caterham, the £79,995 Seven CSR Twenty delivers 0-60mph in a blistering 3.9sec, thanks to 210bhp and very little weight.

There are several authorised Caterham retailers nationwide with properly vetted used examples, too.

BEST FOR OVEREXUBERANT FUN IN A SMALL PACKAGE

ABARTH 695 BIPOSTO *(2014-2020)*

We're all familiar with the Fiat 500. Cute and unthreatening, isn't it? The Abarth 695 Biposto, on the other hand, sees things a bit differently. Although it's based on the unassuming 500, it's the ultimate Italian small road racer hell-bent on hitting a sub-six-seconds 0-62mph time (5.9sec).

This little cracker removes and adds at the same time. Rear seats? None, but you get a bodyshell-stiffening titanium rear brace instead of upholstery, hence the Biposto (Italian for twin-seat) name. Its design ethos was a significant weight reduction to create a track-focused experience.

The comforts of a radio or air-conditioning, perhaps? Sorry, no again. But there is the option of a dog-ring gearbox, essentially a clutchless system typically found in racing cars to deliver ultra-rapid gear changes.

If you find the prospect of the 695's scarcity, along with thin polycarbonate windows and plastic door parts to achieve a dry weight of 997kg, too much, then the Abarth 595 is a compelling alternative to access the uniqueness of an Abarth. The 595's 1.4-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine produces 163bhp and has a conventional five-speed gearbox.

No matter which Abarth you pick, the appeal of a small three-door hatchback which has been stripped-out by an Italian specialist is hard to ignore. Driving either the Abarth 595 or 695 Biposto will cheer up any driver fatigued by heavy sports cars that are often too wide to navigate the UK's narrow roads.

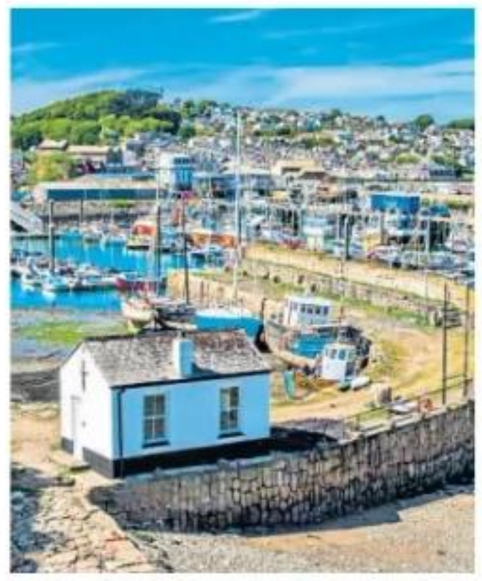
Indeed it's the sheer preposterousness of what appears to be a Fiat 500 being turned into a mini-Italian sports car, while not taking itself too seriously, that could make a Sunday drive a complete hoot.

Magic, mystery and mizzle in western Cornwall

It's the UK's favourite county for family holidays, but if you carry on past Penzance you'll find ancient landscapes and standing stones, says *SK Tremayne*

People say that everything changes when you cross the Tamar from Devon into Cornwall. And it's true. Everything becomes slightly poorer, prettier, sweeter, rainier. The light sharpens, even as the B-roads begin to narrow in the mizzle.

But those who really love Cornwall know there is a second, secret frontier. It lies at the sea-sprayed western edge of little Penzance, the last proper town in West Britain, where the land curves away and the Atlantic begins to feel infinite. Cross that invisible line and you enter a coastline that is magical, strange, ancient – and still possessed of an historic remoteness, despite the ravages of mass tourism. This peculiar charm is why I chose it as the setting for my new thriller, *The Wrecker's Girl*.



The start of the adventure: Newlyn, west of Penzance

The spell begins as Penzance merges into Newlyn. In the 1880s this medieval harbour became an artist's colony, and it retains a bohemian air. Yet it is still a working fishing port, the connoisseur's St Ives: full of busy trawlers and lobster merchants rather than chic galleries and tote bags.

From Newlyn, you have two choices. A short detour inland leads to Madron Well, one of the most atmospheric sacred sites in the British Isles. Here a medieval stone baptistry, shrouded by damp greenery, shelters a spring that has been sacred since prehistory, sought out by the sick who came to imbibe its iron-rich waters.

Alternatively, you can take the coastal road, which wriggles through dense, arthritic woodland and sudden plunging lanes, until you drop into absurdly cute Mousehole, pronounced "Mowzel". Here the harbour-wall curls in tightly, sheltering a handful of boats.

The South West Coast Path continues from here, offering some of the finest walks in the realm. You can hike past Point Spaniard, along cliff ledges thick with thrift and sea campion, and be rewarded with constant views over Mount's Bay. Inland, tiny, defiant fields are scattered with megaliths and prehistoric burial mounds. The Merry Maidens stone circle is especially poignant: girls frozen into stone for scandalously dancing on the Sabbath.

Now comes Lamorna Cove, tucked into another wooded valley. The water here is usually calm enough for swimming, even when the open sea is choppy. It is pebbly rather than sandy, it's also clear, clean and wonderfully refreshing after a hot walk, with a cute café above the waters.

Further west comes Porthcurno, where submarine cables once linked Britain to its empire; today, sunbathers bask where global communications were born. Around here you'll also find the improbable miracle that is the Minack Theatre, hanging off a cliff. Shakespeare is regularly performed here, against the backdrop of the mighty Atlantic. It is one of the most grandly located theatres on the planet.

I could go on, because there is so much more: the Stone Age villages, the wind-scoured headlands, the forgotten coves and zawns. But half the fun is discovering the hidden places for yourself. This lovely, intricate shoreline rewards the explorer.

At the end of this seaside adventure you come to Land's End, where the flower-strewn meadows finally yield to the waves. Ignore the touristic frivolities and walk out onto the granite. Let the wind rearrange you. On a clear day, far out on the horizon, the Isles of Scilly shimmer like a dream, allegedly remnants of the drowned kingdom of Lyonesse. You may get the urge to make up stories.

'This lovely, intricate shoreline rewards the explorer'

GETTY

***The Wreckers Girl** by S.K. Tremayne (HarperCollins) is out now*

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Arts

SEARCHLIGHT

The misrepresentation of Ann Lee

As a film about the founder of the Shaker sect hits cinemas, one of its adherents tells *Lucy Denyer* what he thinks of the portrayal

Arnold Hadd was 21 when he gave up all his possessions, moved away from his family and vowed to stay celibate for the rest of his days.

That was 48 years ago. Today, Brother Arnold, as he has since been known, has no regrets. "I have no doubt this is where I'll die," he says easily. "I've gone through all my trials, tribulations, temptations, doubts, failures and whatever else. Now I'm a lifer, absolutely."

On the screen in front of me Brother Arnold is affable, easygoing, dressed in a dark blue shirt, taking regular swigs from a large cup of tea and looking far younger with his close-cropped grey beard and piercing blue eyes than his 69 years. He is talking to me from the Dwelling House, the biggest building on the Shaker compound where he lives in Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

Built in 1884, it's six storeys tall, with 48 rooms that housed the 200-odd Shakers that made up the community then. Now, though, there are only three Shakers living there: Brother Arnold, Sister June, 87, and as of last spring, Sister April, 59, who is in her novitiate (or trial) first year of living as a Shaker. Together, the trio are the last remaining vestige of a faith that tens of thousands of Americans opted to follow over the past two centuries.

The story of how that faith came to be is told in a new film, *The Testament of Ann Lee*, starring Amanda Seyfried as the eponymous Lee. In 1774, she led a small band of followers from Manchester, England, where they had been jailed and beaten for following her heretical teachings, to New England in the US, where they established Shakerism. Lee, the daughter of a blacksmith, believed and taught that God was both male and female; that true virtue required sacrificing individual desires and possessions for the collective good; and that fleshly pleasures should be eschewed in the pursuit of a godly life.

Describing itself as a "musical drama", the film is an intense, brooding affair with an undertone of gothic horror, full of lingering shots, low-lit scenes and an emphasis on sex. Directed by Mona Fastvold (and co-written with her husband Brady Corbet, the director of last year's Oscar-winning period epic *The Brutalist*), we see Ann revolted by her parents' copulation (the insinuation being that this early exposure is what led to her later rejection of conjugality); her naked rear being rhythmically spanked by her husband before intercourse; the frantic coupling of a pair of lustful sinners in an outhouse; a glimpse of Ann's brother, William, and his male lover, nude, post-coital and illuminated in a shaft of sunlight.

Seyfried, best known for wholesome turns in *Mamma Mia!* and *Mean Girls*, is by turns bountifully buxom and artistically

Faint praise: Amanda Seyfried, centre, in *The Testament of Ann Lee*

starved-looking; when she is filled with the spirit she beats her chest and casts her eyes heavenward, pouting. *Telegraph* film critic Robbie Collin described it as "fearlessly feral" in his four-star review. Brother Arnold was not as keen.

When I ask him about it, he says the film is "horrible". "It just hasn't had very much to do with fact," he says plainly. "It was just really bad." I ask him in what way, and he reels off a list of inaccuracies. For a start, Mother Ann, as the Shakers refer to her, "was very big; she was a large, fleshy woman. She used to have to retreat to the cellar stairs in the summertime to find relief. But she was also powerful – she was not a skinny, sickly blonde".

The testimonies – written, contemporary accounts of the life and times of Ann Lee – are very clear that when she left prison, she marched right out and stood up to her prosecutors, Brother Arnold adds: completely the opposite to what happens in the film, where a weak, limp Lee is carried out of jail by her brother. Neither, he adds, did Lee think of herself as the feminist she is presented as in the film, "because she was never thinking about anything about that kind of role for herself. She saw herself as a prophet, as somebody who's bringing the good news. She thought of herself like Saint Paul – the superlative apostle".

"The costumes are wrong, the music is completely wrong, it's set in another time period 40 years after Mother died. They didn't have uniforms. We didn't live in a community then. We didn't have those buildings whatsoever. We didn't have dancing like that – it was much more Pentecostal and people would be singing or babbling on or rolling or twirling,

Continued on page 14

'We live as Jesus did, owning nothing. And celibate,' says Brother Arnold Hadd

Continued from page 13

like disorganised chaos. Confession of sin isn't done publicly. They made it seem like Father William was gay when in fact we know he was married with a child and he gave up his family to join the Shakers. And all the Freudian sexual stuff…

"It's just very aggravating," he concludes, before taking another swig of his tea.

Fastvold did not consult the Shaker community on the film. "She didn't want to, because we have our reasons for being Shakers, and she had her reasons for wanting to make the film."

Brother Arnold has become something of a poster boy for the Shakers – the public face of this quiet, radical religion. He is a chatty, likeable combination of the ascetic and the practical; perhaps he has had to be, as one of the last custodians of his faith. Raised as a Methodist, he started volunteering for the Shakers in his late teens, and formally became the seventh member of the community in January 1978 (against the wishes of his family; his father didn't speak to him for seven years), the youngest by some decades.

Over the years, the largest number of members he's lived alongside is 11 – a far cry from the 6,000-odd believers at the peak of the Shaker population. But, he says, "we're a small church, and we're always going to be small because of the rigours of the life. We sum it up as the three Cs: the confession of sin, the opening of the mind and the community of goods. We live as Jesus and the Apostles did, owning nothing. And celibate. Those are all stumbling blocks."

Despite this, the Shakers collect a willing band of volunteers who join them for periods of time to work and explore the faith for themselves – there are currently four people living within the community to decide if it is for them in the long term. Over the last couple of decades, Brother Arnold tells me, most of those who have applied have been in their 30s and 40s; three of the four currently on their year-long test are in their 20s.

As the community's cook, Brother Arnold is first out of bed to make breakfast before it's served at 7.30am. That's followed by a communal prayer service, then everyone goes out to do their various jobs. Brother Arnold runs the farm with its flock of 70 sheep, and three rescue cows, looks after the vegetable garden, serves as both elder and trustee of the Shaker's business affairs and acts as both historian and librarian, as well as dealing with all outside correspondence.

The group meets again briefly for prayers at 11.30am, then eats their main meal at noon. Sister April is a vegetarian, as is another April who works for the Shakers; some people have issues with gluten, a regular visitor is vegan, meaning Brother Arnold often has to make multiple dishes, "and they always want a dessert at noontime, too. I'm always looking for recipes."

Three nights a week, there's a 5pm activity: singing meeting, Shaker Studies and Shakerism 101. Supper is at 5.30pm and evenings are free: generally, the trio will congregate in the sitting room to watch TV, talk or read one of the two daily newspapers they subscribe to (the *Portland Press Herald* and the *Lewiston Sun Journal*). On Sundays there is no "unnecessary" work and the morning service is open to the public – who also visit at other times to buy the herbs and teas harvested from the garden, as well as beeswax candles, jams, jellies and relishes, not to mention the famous austere Shaker furniture, or to visit the museum.

> 'We have our reasons for being Shakers, and she had her reasons for making the film'

It's a busy life but not, says Brother Arnold, a lonely one. "I've never been lonely here once," he says. Not that he has time to be – he hasn't had a holiday since 2006. It's "chaos, mostly," he laughs.

It is a life that is both conservative and liberal, obedient and radical, exhausting and uplifting. The Shakers are celibate but believe God possesses both male and female genders (they reject the Trinity). Their lifestyle embraces simplicity, yet they were the first people in town to own an automobile; they aim for self-sufficiency but part of that means running a successful business that includes a large gravel pit, 40 acres in hay, 19,000 apple trees, a gift shop, museum and the sale of yarn from the wool of their sheep – which allows them to buy in the goods they can't produce by themselves. As Brother Arnold puts it, "We finally learnt in the mid-20th century to really diversify our economy."

***The Testament of Ann Lee** is in cinemas now*

'I'm not interested in upsetting people'

The Office producer Ash Atalla gives his take on the state of the modern sitcom. By *Chris Bennion*

"The rhythm of my life has been quite unusual," says Ash Atalla, with some understatement. The comedy producer – who famously, as a BBC intern, convinced the BBC to green-light *The Office* and let him produce it – has a story worthy of Hollywood. Many are already familiar with the main points: contracting polio as a baby in the early 1970s which left him disabled; moving from Cairo to the United Kingdom with his doctor parents; then becoming the tyro producer behind one of Britain's greatest sitcoms.

But an appearance last year on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* opened eyes to a life even more extraordinary. Having his wheelchair swept for bombs in the Belfast Woolworth's at the height of the Troubles. Watching his teenage school friends die of HIV during the infected blood scandal. Becoming the City of London's worst stockbroker. A "midlife crisis" at 24. It's quite the biography for a man inextricably linked with a sitcom about the mundane.

Now, in the Soho offices of his production company, Roughcut Television, Atalla, 53, is happy to talk about all of that. But you get the sense he doesn't want to. He'd like to talk about TV comedy, how it works, why it sometimes doesn't, why it's more difficult to produce than it used to be, how he finds fresh talent despite being unable to bring himself to watch new comedy.

Atalla doesn't look back, navel-gaze or rest on his laurels – this is the man who decided to part ways with Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant after *The Office*. His sense of worth, it seems, resides in the next thing. "The desire to leave my comfort zone is exhaustingly strong in me," he says. "Being comfortable would make me anxious."

The next thing for Atalla is the second series of BBC Two's Bafta-nominated *We Might Regret This*. The show is notable for being the first Atalla-produced work to focus on a wheelchair user, a subject he has professionally avoided for 30 years. In the comedy-drama, co-creator Kyla Harris plays Freya, a loosely fictionalised version of herself – a tetraplegic Canadian artist navigating a tricky London love life in her 30s. The comedy is acid, unsentimental and bracingly honest. At the heart of it is the "third wheel", Freya's best friend and carer, Jo (played by Elena Saurel). In a memorable scene in the first series, a trip to the toilet ends with Jo receiving a jet of Freya's urine to her face.

"Date night is usually a two-person enterprise. Sex is usually a two-person enterprise," says Atalla, remembering Harris's initial pitch. "What happens when there has to be a third person? I just thought, 'Wow, what good territory: how messy, how knotty'."

Atalla has never wanted to indulge the wheelchair-user clichés. "You don't need me to make a TV show to tell you that stairs are difficult for a wheelchair user," he says. Atalla wasn't on set for the production, but says the company was anxious to be "best-in-class" when it came to access: "What you don't want is to be a scene from your own show, the actor who can't get to their own toilet offstage."

Atalla has never wanted to be a scene in any of his own shows. From *The IT Crowd*, *Cuckoo* and *Look Around You* to *People Just Do Nothing*, *Big Boys* and *Stath Lets Flats*, the emphasis has always been on the laughs. *We Might Regret This* is the closest thing Atalla has produced to a modern-day, issues-led "sadcom" – and even that defies those labels. You might think that a man with Atalla's remarkable hit-rate (his mantelpiece groans with Bafta, Emmy, Golden Globe, Rose d'Or and RTS awards) was steeped in British comedy from when he was in nappies. His path to being the don of British TV comedy producers, however, was satisfyingly unconventional.

WIREIMAGE/MATT WRITTLE/JACK BARNES

Born in Cairo in 1972, Atalla contracted polio in his early months and was not expected to survive. His parents decided that 1970s Egypt would be an unforgiving place for a boy who had to use a wheelchair, and they looked to the UK for work. His father took the one job he could, as a gynaecologist in war-torn Belfast. This experience defies expectations too; Atalla has only happy memories from his years in Northern Ireland, with the locals being rather delighted by this merry, curly-haired Egyptian boy in a bright red wheelchair, sporting an accent "like Ian Paisley".

A move to Hampshire at the age of 10 proved to be less joyful, with Atalla attending Treloar's, a specialist school which saw one of the most distressing episodes of the infected blood scandal, when at least 72 pupils died from Aids-related conditions and hepatitis.

Funny business: Atalla, centre, with *The Office* stars Ricky Gervais, Mackenzie Crook, Stephen Merchant and Martin Freeman at the 2004 Baftas

After university and a short-lived stab in the City, Atalla felt the pull of television. "I didn't have any contacts, I just started writing letters to the BBC. It's the folly of youth." Eventually, those letters led to unpaid work experience as a researcher on *Watchdog* and *Mysteries with Carol Vorderman*.

There was also an unexpected stint in front of the camera, co-presenting Channel 4's disability magazine show *Freak Out* (the other hosts were actor Mat Fraser and, remarkably, Bernard Manning). "I had a cynical approach to my chair at this moment," he remembers. *Freak Out* was a stepping stone. "You use the chair to get the door slightly ajar, and then once you're inside, you don't use it at all."

Was he a good TV presenter? "I was terrible."

He proved to be little better as a researcher, but his boss at *Watchdog* noted that he was funny and introduced him to the BBC comedy department. He was given a pile of scripts to read and, unasked for, began editing them. It was Atalla's eureka moment. "It's a pompous statement, but I felt like I'd come home," he says. While there on an informal two-month training contract, he met a young trainee called Steve, who'd made a 20-minute demo pilot called *Seedy Boss* with his mate Ricky.

While many others passed on *The Office*, the BBC took the risk. Was there any chance that they would take the scripts, but find a producer with some experience? "Probably," laughs Atalla, "but we made a Faustian pact, Ricky, Steve and I. They wanted to direct, which was massively overplaying their hand because they had no leverage. So they asked me, somebody with no leverage, to get them leverage."

How did three unknowns convince the BBC to give them free rein? "I think the three of us had, let's say, an adequate amount of confidence."

Times have changed in Atalla's three decades in TV comedy. The streamers have skewed the landscape, obscure British comedies – which America once adored – are now harder to get off the ground and fewer places are willing to produce comedy. Atalla estimates that 70 per cent of the hit shows he produced, including *The Office*, wouldn't get green-lit today.

Another thing that has changed is the perception of what is acceptable in comedy. Back in the 2000s, Atalla encouraged Gervais to make ableist jokes about him on stage, yet on *Desert Island Discs* he said that he has since wondered whether it was the right thing to do. He certainly isn't losing any sleep over the topic of offence and

> His co-host on Channel 4's disability magazine show, remarkably, was Bernard Manning

comedy, however. "I'm surprised that that is the question I get asked most often," he says. "There's no 'culture war' in what I do. I don't understand the you-can't-say-that-any-more brigade; it's so reductive."

Atalla presumably does not subscribe to Jerry Seinfeld's opinion that TV comedy has been ruined by the "extreme Left"? "I don't even understand why he would think that. Look at his work – one of the greatest sitcoms ever – where is the culture war in that? *Seinfeld* is mostly a bloke worrying about having too many pickles in his sandwich."

Despite that, Atalla found himself with a front-row seat at one of the biggest culture war fallouts when a 2008 episode of *The IT Crowd*, "The Speech", was pulled from Channel 4's streaming platform in 2020 after some viewers complained of its depiction of a transgender woman. The incident prompted writer Graham Linehan to speak out, and began his path to being a comedy pariah. How does Atalla reflect on it all?

"The question is: is it enough of a defence to say that it was of its time? And I think, yes it is. The world moves on, things move on. There are definitely a couple of bits of *The Office* that we wouldn't do now. *The IT Crowd* – 98 per cent of it is fine, and 2 per cent, yeah, we wouldn't do now."

While Atalla does not mention Linehan by name, he does say this: "I'm not interested in upsetting people with my comedy. And if we have done, I would apologise and move on. I don't want to be sitting in rooms arguing with people about politics or race or anything through my work. That's not where I want my career to live. So if this joke offended you, some people go, 'Well, I'm not going to apologise, I'm not going to back down'. I go, 'Really? F--- it, mate, I'm sorry'. And move on."

Atalla, however, is not one for looking back. Having helped comedy talents such as Chris O'Dowd, Richard Ayoade, Jamie Demetriou and Jack Rooke break through, he is now looking at the next generation. A second series of Lucia Keskin's anarchic sitcom *Things You Should Have Done* recently aired on BBC Three, while Josh Pugh's *Stepping Up* arrives later this year on Channel 4. Both comedians gained prominence thanks to social media.

Atalla's determination to keep moving forward helps to prevent the comedy he produces from feeling fusty, though he credits that to the younger producers at Roughcut. If he finds himself becoming an old man of comedy, however, he'll walk away.

"Leave the pitch before you get angry," he says. "I see people turn on the job that gave them the big house. And I don't intend to be that guy."

Atalla's latest award-winning show, *We Might Regret This*, is back on BBC Two

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